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**Perceived Experiences That Positively Contribute to High-Achieving
African American Male Student Success at a Large Urban
Community College**

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Community College**

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Dedication

In loving memory of my sister, Latarch D. Grays. Thank you for being my guardian angel and I hope I have made you one proud little sister.

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Perceived Experiences That Positively Contribute to High-Achieving African American Male Student Success at a Large Urban Community College

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Over the past two decades there have been increasing concerns about the steady decline in higher education attainment levels of African American males. There is extant literature that on African American male academic achievement and success in four-year institutions from a deficit model perspective. There is little research on high-achieving African American male students, specifically in community colleges. This study examined the lived experiences of six high-achieving African American male students enrolled in a large urban community college. The research study brings to light the perspectives of academically successful young men as well as their interpretations and understandings of how their lived experiences contributed to their academic development and success. This qualitative study responded to the following research questions: (1) What secondary school experiences do high-achieving African American males perceived as contributing to their academic success? (2) What personal experiences do high-achieving African American males perceive as contributing to their academic success in a large urban community college? (3) What institutional programs or services do high-achieving African American males perceive as contributing to their academic

success in a large urban community college? The participants were 6 high-achieving African American and Black males attending a large urban community college located in the Texas Gulf Coast region. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews. The analysis of the data yielded ten major themes (1) College Preparation, (2) High School Peer Influence, (3) Extracurricular Activity Participation, (4) Self-Motivation, (5) Family Interactions, (6) Adjustment to College, (7) Engagement, (8) Participation in Student Organizations, (9) Leadership Development Programs, and (10) Academic Support Services. The information gleaned from this study may contribute to the scarce body of knowledge that examined factors that contribute to the academic success for high-achieving African American men in a community college.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Community colleges serve as the gateway to higher education for millions of Americans. The accessibility and relatively low cost of community colleges make them particularly attractive to low-income African American and first generation college students. Unfortunately, research shows that far too few of these students succeed (Crooks, Collado, Martin, & Castro, 2010). Low levels of engagement in college, and lack of academic success among minority males, including African American male students, are persistent concerns among community college administrators, faculty, and staff. Consequently, institutions are seeking ways to reach out to this population and offer programs to enhance their educational development.

Nationwide, community colleges have implemented specific programs and initiatives for the purpose of increasing persistence, engagement, and success rates of minority males (AACC, 2011). A few examples of these programs include specialized mentoring programs, leadership development and training, and gender-specific courses that target African American males. However, if these specialized programs are functioning in a way to increase graduation and success rates of minority men in higher education, an understanding of the extent to which these programs actually improve engagement and achievement among minority male students is equally important (Dabney-Smith, 2009).

The two-year college often represents African American males' first experiences with postsecondary education, and for many, their last opportunity for obtaining a degree beyond a high school diploma (Bush & Bush, 2005). It is important that African American male students not only pursue post-secondary education but also obtain a degree in order to increase their chances of finding better jobs that provide a sustainable

wage. The social and economic conditions for African American males continue to decline. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2010), 17.7% of African American males were classified as college graduates or having completed more than four years of college, while 30.8% of White males were classified as college graduates or having completed more than four years of college. In 2013, 58.6% of African American males were unemployed in comparison to 41.4% of African American females (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Adding to the educational disparity is the increasing number of African American males who are incarcerated. For example, in 1980, approximately 3.5% of African American men were incarcerated; however, in 2014, African American males accounted for 37% of all males incarcerated, as reported in the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics (2014).

While many at-risk student populations, such as first generation and African Americans face persistence and completion challenges, African American males are among some of the most likely to depart from the community college. Therefore, it is important that higher education practitioners find the reasons why African American males become disengaged from the postsecondary educational process (Glenn, 2001; H.P. Mason, 1994, 1998; Wood & Turner, 2011; Harper, 2006). African American male students' declining college enrollments, disengagement, underachievement, and low rates of baccalaureate degree completion are among the most pressing and complex issues in American higher education (Harper, 2012). In an effort to minimize the long-term effects of low college attainment levels of African American males, institutions of higher education have been responsive to the challenges of increasing student success and graduation rates among this student population. Community college leaders and administrators, in particular, have been diligently working to develop and implement programs and services aimed at increasing graduation rates for African American males.

Consequently, research on effective strategies to reverse declining college enrollment of African American males has emerged as the result of innovative and collaborative efforts among community college researchers and experts (Marshall, 2011).

In recent years, African American males have been the center of national attention with numerous books, articles and conferences focused on engaging and increasing the educational attainment levels of African American men. Within the past ten years, there has been a substantial increase in research related to the social, cultural and systemic challenges faced by many African American males in higher education (Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2009; Harper & Griffin, 2011; Strayhorn, 2009; Lundy-Wagner & Gasman, 2011). In spite of the attention that African American male college students have attracted in recent years, the literature on African American males in education focuses, almost exclusively, on problems this group faces rather than the reasons why many other African American male students continue to persist and excel in postsecondary education. Jackson and Moore (2008) note that the vast literature, projects a seemingly dismal outlook for African American male college students. Little is known about how some African American male students manage to navigate through the academic process and complete their educational journeys. In fact, some scholars suggest there is limited research available on the perceptions of high-achieving African American male students' experiences while enrolled in college (Harper, 2004, 2006b & 2012; Bonner, 2001 & 2010; Griffin, 2006; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Ovueraye-Adoghe, 2013). Moreover, there are even fewer studies that address the experiences of these students in the context of large urban community colleges (Wood & Hilton, 2012).

The majority of research conducted on African American male students in community colleges has been in the form of unpublished doctoral dissertations (Wood, 2010). Thus, this lack of published scholarship has led faculty, staff, and administrators at

community colleges to rely upon research conducted on four-year university students rather than community college students, as well as other populations (Pino, 2005; Beckles, 2008). Additionally, Flowers (2006) suggests that the African American male student experience in community colleges may vary significantly from their counterparts in four-year institutions. Researchers have noted that African American male students in four-year universities have higher levels of social integration and engagement than those in community colleges (Harper, 2009; Flowers, 2006).

While the personal backgrounds and experiences may be similar in nature, the institutional differences between community colleges and four-year universities should be carefully considered when transferring the knowledge to African American males in community colleges. Additionally, exploring African American males' perceptions about their K-12 experiences may provide some insight about the possible indicators of success among high-achieving African American males. This study attempts to gain understanding about the perceptions and different factors that seem to impact academic success of African American male students who attend community college. By focusing on the perceptions of African American male students' experiences, college administrators and researchers may develop a better understanding of what ways, if any, African American male student perceptions reflect internal and external factors that may impact academic achievement and graduation rates in this population of students.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The low level of educational attainment of African American males, in comparison to their African American female and White male counterparts, is of concern. In 2008, only 33.4% of African American male high school graduates between the ages of 15 and 24 were enrolled in postsecondary education. Among all African Americans,

females had a higher percentage of postsecondary enrollment at a rate 55.5% compared to African American males' postsecondary enrollment at 44.5% (College Board, 2013). African American male student degree completion rates are also significantly lower than their female and non-African American male counterparts. During 2013-2014, African American males accounted for 34% of bachelor degrees awarded, while African American females accounted for approximately 66% of bachelor degrees awarded to all African Americans. White males accounted for 44% of total bachelor degrees awarded to all Whites, and Hispanic males accounted for approximately 39% of bachelor degrees awarded to all Hispanics (NCES, 2015). Additionally, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2015), 57% of all African American males who start college do not graduate within six years. African American males have the lowest college completion rate among both sexes and all racial and ethnic groups in higher education (Harper, 2006).

The Schott Foundation's (2012) report suggests that there has been progress in the national high school graduation rate for African American males, with the rate increasing from 42% in 2001-2002 to 52% in 2009-2010. However, in spite of these marked improvements, progress toward closing the gap between African American and White males has only achieved a 3% gain from 29% to 26%, as observed in Figure 1.

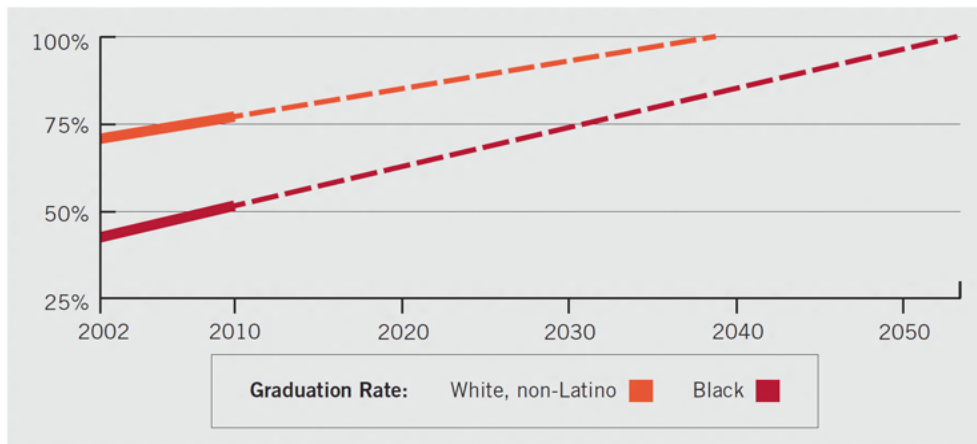


Figure 1: High School Graduation Gaps. The Schott 50 State Report on Public Education

National averages indicate that only slightly more than half of Black males who enter the ninth grade are likely to receive their high school diploma in four years (Orfield, Losen, Wald & Swanson, 2004). Notwithstanding the data and research which points to the societal challenges and barriers often encountered by African American males, the discourse on African American male student success in higher education is shifting to an anti-deficit framework. Conchas (2006), noted despite the research, African American males recognize the system societal constraints, yet they do not allow them to impede their ability to achieve success. Contrary to the dominant perception of African American male success, these men have historically demonstrated a high level of interest in attending college (Kim & Hargrove, 2013).

Much of the data on African American male students point to the reasons why they fail; however, little is known about how some African American male students manage to excel academically in college despite the barriers they may have encountered while on their educational journey. As Sharon Fries-Britt proposes, “the disproportionate focus on Black underachievement in the literature not only distorts the image of the community of Black collegians, it creates, perhaps unintentionally, a lower set of

expectations for Black student achievement” (1997, p. 556). Furthermore, few studies focus on high-achieving African American male college students and the impact their secondary school experiences have on the way they navigate through the academic process once they are admitted to college (Bonner, 2001; Fries-Britt, 1997; Harper 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; Harper & Quaye, 2007; Harper, 2012). Consequently, there was a need to explore African American male students’ perspectives about what contributes to their academic achievement and successful navigation of their college experience, including their secondary education experience.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

As community college leaders and national research organizations continue to explore and develop strategies and programs to increase student success, it was important to gain a better understanding of high-achieving African American male students’ perceptions about their academic experiences. Research that goes beyond describing traits and conditions, or comparing outcomes of academically successful African American males in higher education, was relatively scant (Wilkins, 2005; Harvey, 2002). Few studies explored the experiences and perceptions of high-achieving African American males in community colleges (Wood, 2010). Therefore, this qualitative study explored high-achieving African American male community college students’ perceptions concerning their pre-college and college experiences, which might have contributed to their success.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study was rooted in Harper’s Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework (2012), which

...inverts questions that commonly asks about disadvantage, underrepresentation, insufficient preparation, academic underperformance, disengagement, and Black male student attrition.

This study focused on the experiences of high-achieving African American and Black male students enrolled at a community college and their perception of factors that contributed to their academic success. For the purpose of this study, a high-achieving African American or Black male student includes those students who have achieved at least a 3.5 cumulative grade point average for at least four semesters while enrolled in an academic or workforce program in a large urban community college. The research questions that guided this study are:

1. What secondary school experiences do high-achieving African American males perceive as contributing to their academic success?
2. What personal experiences do high-achieving African American males perceive as contributing to their academic success in a large urban community college?
3. What institutional programs or services do high-achieving African American males perceive as contributing to their academic success in a large urban community college?

BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE METHODOLOGY

This qualitative case study explored the personal experiences of African American males to assess the perceived experiences they may attribute to their academic achievement. Due to the limited amount of research associated with the potential factors that lead to the academic achievement of African American males in community colleges, the variables needed to conduct a quantitative study were not known. “Qualitative inquiry is inductive – focusing on process, understanding, and interpretation – rather than deductive and experimental” (p. 21). The specific research methods

employed was a case study. The case study approach provided the researcher a rich, thick description of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1998) and provides the researcher an opportunity to gather data on a particular phenomenon within its context (Yin, 2003). Generally, qualitative research seeks to gain insight and understanding of how people experience the world, and is grounded in interpretivism (Willis, 2007). This philosophical approach is based on the assumption that human beings view the world they live in with unique perspectives, and that there is something to be gained from exploring those perceptions (Willis, 2007). A purposeful sample of six high-achieving African American and Black male students, enrolled in a large urban community college, comprised the study. Participants and data were collected using qualitative research protocols, such as interviews, researcher field notes, observations, and document analysis.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

Retention – student consecutively enrolled for two semesters.

Black males – males of African or West Indies descent

African American males – males of African descent who were born in the United States.

International student – students born outside the United States

Student persistence – the ability of a student to complete a semester of enrollment and re-enroll for a second semester. This term is also used to describe students who remain enrolled.

First-generation student – students whose parents or grandparents never enrolled in college.

Student success – completion of a degree or certificate program in a community college.

Academically successful – a student demonstrating a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher.

Student departure – students who enroll in two-year institutions and do not complete their first year of enrollment.

High-achieving – a student demonstrating a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher.

Completion – the ability of a student to successfully complete a degree or certificate program.

LIMITATIONS

The researcher employed a case study (Yin, 1993) to describe perceived experiences that contribute to the academic success of African American male students. The purposeful selection (Patton, 2002) of the subjects was dependent upon the willingness of the subjects to participate; therefore, findings may not be generalizable to all community colleges.

DELIMITATIONS

This study was designed to explain how high-achieving African American male students perceived their academic experience while enrolled in a large urban community college only. Therefore, this study took into consideration the literature and research related to African American male community college students who demonstrated academic success by achieving a 3.5 grade point average (GPA). This study did not include male students of other racial or ethnic backgrounds, nor did it focus on the academic experiences of African American males enrolled in four-year colleges.

ASSUMPTIONS

The researcher entered the study with several assumptions based on prior professional experience and knowledge of the community college setting. First, the researcher assumed that the community college where the study was to be conducted was attempting to enhance the program and services offered to increase the levels of academic

success among African American and Black male students. The researcher also assumed that students would be fully engaged in the interview process and would answer all questions honestly and without reservation. Lastly, the researcher assumed that interview responses, although limited in scope, would be generally representative of perceptions of part-time and full-time high-achieving African American male students.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

As the demand increased for a more skilled and educated workforce, the need to offer educational opportunities to every American became even more apparent. However, according to previous research, fewer African American males were enrolling in higher education; or, worse yet, those who did enroll failed to persist through graduation more than their female or non-African American male student counterparts. This study provided useful insight into high-achieving African American and Black male students' perspectives about their college experiences. The resulting information might be useful to community colleges as they formulate strategies for increasing engagement, persistence, and graduation rates among this student population. Moreover, this study seeks to add to the current literature on high-achieving African American and Black males in community colleges.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter provided an overview of the national attention that has been directed toward African American male students in higher education. However, it is important to note that the context for most of the research and studies conducted was primarily in four-year college institutions. Further, much of the literature emphasizes the deficit model of African American male student college performance. Some scholars (Harper, 2006; Fries-Britt, 1997; Bonner, 2001) suggested that more research was needed to better

understand the educational experiences and perceptions of high-achieving African American male students. More specifically, research about the experience and perceptions of high-achieving African American male community college students is necessary to provide insight into the institutional and individual factors, which may facilitate engagement, persistence, and graduation of these students. Chapter Two provides a review of the literature as it relates to academic experiences, external influences, and foundational theories, which may be ascribed to African American male academic success in community colleges.

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

African American male student success represents an exceptional phenomenon in academia. Duneier (1992) implies that most of the studies about African American males are a regurgitation of “what we know about what it means to be a Black man in America, but they tell far too little about the Black man’s inner strength, his resolve, his pride, and his sincerity” (p. 26). Further, Harper (2006) suggests there is a need to explore contemporary issues and challenges faced by African American male college students in an attempt to understand the conditions and factors, which positively influence the persistence of African American males in higher education. The purpose of this study is to collect, analyze, and report high-achieving African American male students’ perceptions of factors that contribute to their academic success. Thus, the following is a review of the literature related to factors that may affect the academic success of African American males in higher education, more specifically in large urban community colleges.

Merriam (1998) suggests that the literature provides a meaningful foundation for contributing to the knowledge base. This literature review will begin with a narrative of the African American male educational experience and how masculinity may impact academic achievement. An examination of African American male experiences in secondary and postsecondary schools will follow, specifically community college settings, then lead into a broad overview of African American male student success and how factors such as family, culture, and social capital might impact academic success. Lastly, the chapter includes a description of relevant theories, which served as the models for framing the research questions and organizing the findings and conclusions of this study.

THE AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE

In order to fully appreciate the experiences of African American male students, it is necessary to assess the literature in the context of their secondary and postsecondary school experiences. As Harper indicates, “Black and Latino male teens, especially those who reside in America’s largest cities, are persistently portrayed in media and elsewhere negatively, which affect society’s expectations of them and, at times, their expectations of themselves. Visions of them in urban high schools are almost universally negative – they are expected to be the perpetrators of school violence and at the bottom of every statistical metric of educational excellence” (2014, p. 1).

Masculinity and School Achievement

Many African American males have internalized negative stereotypes about themselves, their appearances, and their abilities. As a result, these negatively held beliefs of the dominant culture may have retarded the academic potential of African American males (Wilkins, 2005; Douglass, 2007; Bell, 2009). The experience of African American males in America is unlike any other experience faced by other immigrants (Douglass, 2007). Race and gender often circumscribe the educational experiences and opportunities for African American students, especially for “black males [who] are too often disadvantaged by this perplexing and misunderstood intersection . . . ” (Davis, 2005, p. 131).

For African American males, gender expression in the form of masculinity within the context of school intersects with the boundaries of race. This intersection is often manifested once the expression of African American masculinity becomes racialized and otherwise viewed as "oppositional" to the culture of school. Examples can be observed through "such things as dress and behavior – high fives, special handshakes, forms of greeting," (Tatum, 2005, p. 29).

To the unassuming administrator, teacher or professor, the behaviors associated with masculinity, such as special handshakes, style of dress or speech among African American male students, are viewed as deviant and reprehensible; however, the circumstances for such behavior may be much more complex than what is seen in the peripheral view. Wilkins (2005) posits that gender is socially constructed through relationships, teachings, and reminders of appropriateness, which are produced through the actions of individuals. Consequently, it is little wonder why African American male students are often misunderstood or stereotyped by the broader society, as the socially constructed relationships of these young men often times are not aligned with societal norms.

Several scholars contend that many academically successful African American male students struggle with the paradox of masculinity and “acting White” (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Gibbs, 1988; Steele & Aronson, 1998) suggests that, on one hand, African American men are often the objects of public ridicule and angst, which is projected through mass media by representing the “five ‘D’s’”: dumb, deprived, dangerous, deviant and disturbed” (p. 3). On the other hand, successful, or well-spoken African American males are characterized as arrogant and anti-social. Academically successful African American male students must find the delicate balance of negotiating their academic progress while protecting their masculine identity. For some African American male students, the idea of “being smart” and doing well in school may put them at risk for being bullied by their peers, leading many to hide their academic achievement behind disruptive behavior (Adler et. al, 1992.)

Bell (2010) contends that many African American male students are not adequately equipped with the social skills to balance acceptable classroom behavior with the socially “accepted” behavior expectations of their peers. These males are confronted

with a conflicting dichotomy of two “selves”: the “one-self,” which depicts what community and peers expect of them; and the “other-self,” what the school expects of them”. Often times, this “two-self” paradox imposes a significant challenge for African American males because they are forced to choose between “being cool” or “acting White.”

According to Fordham and Ogbu (1986), “acting White” suggests that African American male students reject the notion of academic achievement as a White behavior due their primary and secondary school experiences of being judged unfairly and labeled as academically deficient by school teachers and administrators. Specifically, they contend that high-achieving African American male students must deal with the burden of being constantly accused of “acting White” by their African American male peers (as cited by Harper, 2006):

Black students’ academic efforts are hampered by both external factors and within-group factors....schooling is perceived by Blacks, especially Black adolescents, as learning to act White, or as trying to cross cultural boundaries. And importantly, school learning is viewed as a subtractive process. In our view, then, the academic learning and performance problems of Black children arise not only from a limited opportunity structure and Black people’s response to it, but also from the way Black people attempt to cope with the “burden of ‘acting White’” (p. 201).

Price (2010) (as cited in Wilkins, 2005) found the term was used by men in his study as a euphemism representing a lack of racial pride and identity, and condescension rather than academic achievement. Lundy (2003) states that African American males, indoctrinated with the ideology of “acting White”, view academically inclined African American males as abandoning their Black cultural identity and rejecting the norms of their peers as well as the peer group itself. Additional studies indicate that the overwhelming need for African American male students to feel a sense of association and

cultural identity takes precedence over academic achievement, which may subsequently include succumbing to peer pressure by hiding academic ability (Horvat & Lewis, 2003). A subset to the masculinity theory, known as “cool pose” theory, was introduced by Majors and Billson (1992) and suggests that Black males take an oppositional stance toward education as a way to cope with the subjugation they have already experienced in school and society. While the theories highlighted in this section attempt to explain the adverse impact of race, masculinity and engagement on African American male student success, there is still a need to focus on their successful experiences in college.

Secondary School Experiences of African American Males

For African American males, high school is a time that can either cultivate or inhibit academic success. High school represents a “coming of age” and adolescent evolution.

Studies have shown that the U. S. has historically been less responsive and supportive to the needs of African Americans in many social institutions, particularly education (Harvey & Harvey, 2005; Harvey, 2008; Levin, Belfield, Muenning, & Rouse, 2007; Moore & Owens, 2008). For example, in the 2012 issue of ETS’s *Policy Notes*, a Texas area school superintendent noted:

A White student, scrawling graffiti might draw a penalty of community service and a mandatory apology; however, for a Black student, the same offense might translate into a phone call to the police, a misdemeanor charge and a trip to juvenile court. In cases where school officials had discretion over how to punish infractions, she found that Black students were far more likely than White ones to be sent away from their home schools to an alternative school. Over a very long period of time, school administrators erred on the side of heavy-handed criminalization of Black boys’ behavior (p. 5).

As a consequence to the reactionary responses of school officials on how they discipline African American boys, there is an overrepresentation of these young men in

the population of students who are suspended and expelled from high school because of zero-tolerance policies enforced by school districts (Caton, 2012; Fenning & Rose, 2007; Ferguson, 2000; Henfield, Owens, & Moore, 2008; Monroe, 2005; Noguera, 2003, 2008; Schott Foundation for Public Education, 2012). According to the 2009 report of the Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) and the 2010 report of the Schott Foundation, African American males in high school are four times more likely than their peers to be suspended and/or expelled. The data also suggests that African American males are often victims of subjective punishment from school administrators (Tanner, 2009). The concept that schools have become the microcosms of the penal system is reflected in the way school administrators manage the problem of student discipline through a prism of crime control.

In addition to being susceptible to harsh disciplinary actions, African American male high school students are far more likely than their White counterparts to have negative expectations imposed upon them regarding their ability to enroll and succeed in postsecondary education by teachers and school administrators (Davis & Jordan, 1994; Epps, 1995; Moore, 2006; Moore et al., 2008; Ogbu, 2003). For example, Polite (1999) studied 115 African American males enrolled at a large metropolitan high school located in the Northwest portion of the United States, and found that many teachers and school counselors often failed to encourage African American males to enroll and engage in college preparatory opportunities, such as advanced mathematics courses. As a result of the lack of sufficient preparation, he found that only one in 15 were actually prepared for college-level work (which is approximately seven to eight students out of 115).

For example, Young (2007) discovered that of the 5.2% of African American students who took the AP examinations administered in the United States, only 7% took the AP English Literature test. Of that group, test scores were far behind those of their

White classmates. “In 2006, the nationwide mean AP score for White students was 2.98; the mean score for African American students was 1.99. Furthermore, in 2005, 63% of the 984,405 White students who took AP exams received a qualifying score of three or above, only approximately 28% of African American students fell in that range” (Cross, 2006, as cited in Young, 2007, p. 3).

Moreover, African American male students are far more likely to be underrepresented in gifted education programs or advanced placement courses (Jackson & Moore, 2006; Moore, Ford, & Milner, 2005a, 2005b). While their White counterparts are often encouraged by school counselors and teachers to enroll in more “academically challenging” courses, such as advanced placement and college preparatory courses, a large proportion of African American male high school students are often placed in low-performing and low-skill classes, which is seemingly perpetuated as a result of their primary school experience, indicated in the previous section of this study.

Research has shown that negative perceptions of African American males may have a direct or indirect impact on their academic performance. For instance, Pigott and Cowen (2000) found that randomly selected African American male students, who were included in a study of males and females, were perceived by teachers to be less likely to graduate from high school and more likely to have problems with future school work than randomly selected White students. Moreover, Wong et al. (1988) postulates that African American male high school students, described in a vignette, were expected to do worse in future careers than White male students. The research supports the idea that teachers’ expectations of students can have a profound impact on their academic achievement. Therefore, it is possible that teachers’ expectations can directly influence the perceptions and attitudes of African American male students’ abilities to be academically successful.

With these impediments to a quality education, it is little wonder why few African American males have the skills necessary to succeed in college (Guess, 2008).

In spite of the dominant culture perception of African American males in secondary schools, research suggests these students tend to do well in college if provided access to pre-collegiate experiences (Cuyjet, 1997, Ellis 2002, Flowers 2006). For example, Swail et al. (2003) found African American students enrolled in pre-calculus and at least one advanced placement or honors course were more likely to persist in college than students who did not.

Community College Experiences of African American Males

Many African American male students acquire their first collegiate experience at community colleges, and share common characteristics. “Black men in community colleges are more likely to be older, be classified as low-income, have dependents (e.g., children), be married, and to have delayed their enrollment in higher education” (Wood & Williams, 2013, p. 3). Unfortunately, meta-level findings across studies indicate that African American males are not adequately equipped to engage in college-level coursework and tend to have poor graduation and retention rates (Brown, 2007; Cuyjet, 2006; Harper, 2009; Wilkins, 2005; Wood & Hilton, 2012). As of 2008, only 30% of African Americans and 20% of Latinos ages 25 to 34 had attained an associate’s degree or higher in the United States, compared to 49% of White Americans and 71% of Asian Americans (Lee & Ransom, 2010). In addition to low graduation and persistence rates, African American males have the lowest mean grade point average (GPA) among their male peers at 2.64 (U. S. Department of Education, 2012). In his research, Harper found that 68% of African American males who enter college do not graduate within six years (2006, p. vii).

Most of the literature regarding African American males in postsecondary education suggests that they enter college underprepared and unengaged, thereby contributing to low persistence and graduation rates among this population of students. Wood and Hilton (2012) highlight external, academic and environmental factors facing African American male community college students as contributors to low success, such as low socio-economic status, racism, and lack of campus involvement or engagement.

The focus of African American male success has gained national attention from organizations such as the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) and the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE). As a result of the widespread epidemic of low persistence and graduation rates of African American male students, community colleges nationwide have begun to invest resources into developing programs and services that support the academic success of African American males. In their 2013 special report, CCSSE offers seven recommendations for community colleges to consider when trying to increase persistence and graduation rates of African American males (and other males of color):

(1) Do what works for all students – inescapable engagement in evidenced-based educational practices and do it at scale, (2) disaggregate student data to monitor engagement and outcomes of different student groups, (3) listen systematically and well to students, and ensure their voices are heard across the college, (4) create venues for regular discussion of participation and achievement gaps, as well as their possible causes, (5) stop tinkering and invest in big changes – scalability of boutique programs, (6) redesign developmental education, (7) build on students’ personal and cultural assets and strengthen their college success skills, and (8) improve faculty and staff diversity as well as their cultural competence. (p. 25)

Despite the extant literature available about the challenges and barriers that African American male community college students encounter while enrolled, little is

known about why and how a small number of African American males tend to excel academically and persist through college to graduation.

AFRICAN AMERICAN MALE STUDENT SUCCESS

Researchers have begun to shift the view of African American male students from a deficit lens to a strength-based lens. Several scholars (Barbarian, 1993; Frieberg, 1993; Rutter, 1987; Werner, 1989) maintain that in spite of the vast research that points to the reasons why African American male students fail, many African American male students learn and achieve success despite circumstances that include low socioeconomic status, low teacher expectations, and limited access to pre-college opportunities. These young men overcome the barriers of economic disenfranchisement and social ostracism to flourish academically (Young, 2007). Harper's anti-deficit achievement framework suggests that researchers use the appreciative inquiry approach to better understand how African American male students successfully navigate their way to and through higher education and beyond (2012).

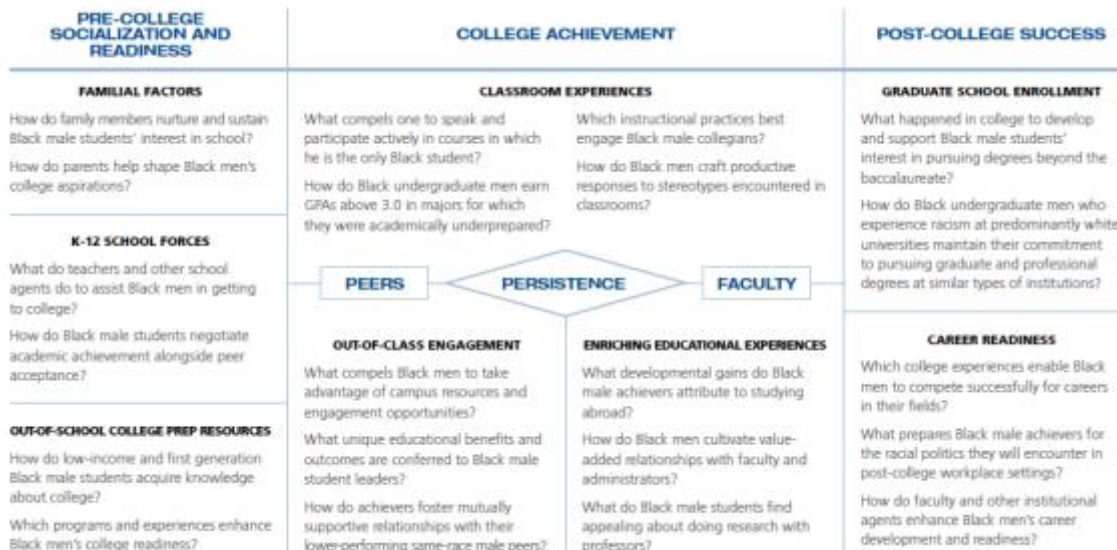


Figure 2: Anti-Deficit Achievement Framework. Academically Successful Black Males, Harper, 2012

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INFLUENCE

In addition to theoretical, social and cultural capital implications, it is important to consider the influence of family and community on African American male student success. Research suggests that family and community culture overwhelmingly contribute to the academic success of students, particularly African American male students, when considering performance on standardized tests and other indicators of college readiness (Young, 2008; Irvine, 1990; Kunjufu, 1988; Kunjufu, 2001). There is significant research to underscore the conclusion that parental support and involvement provide a significant boost to the morale and persistence of students (Figgers, 1997; Matthews, 1984; Williams, 2003). In his 2000 study, Moody concluded that African American college students found parental support to be crucial in their academic advancement. Family structure and home environment can be directly correlated to academic persistence and student success. According to Khattab (2002), when families are positively engaged in the lives of children, students are more likely to pursue ambitious educational goals.

Fordham (1996) discusses the influence of a stable family on high-achieving African American male students. Henderson and Mapp (2002) reviewed comparable studies of African American males relevant to family influence and discovered that households who were highly involved in student achievement, through the use of home support techniques such as homework assistance, in-home testing, and dialoguing about school issues, were more likely to promote academic success. Lester (2004) cites that despite growing up in female-headed, single family households, African American males are achieving academically in school. For many African American male students, having a strong support system goes beyond the family structure. Young (2008) suggests that academically gifted African American males express a need for interest in receiving

support that goes beyond the classroom and into the community. African American men who serve as role models in school, and in the community, have a positive influence on these students:

A high-achieving African American male college student reflecting on his experience expressed this sentiment which is shared by many of his fellow achievers. "I tried to think of ways that I could benefit my community and make it easier for other African American students to graduate" (Harper, 2005, p. 10, as cited in Young, 2008, p. 41).

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CAPITAL AND AFRICAN AMERICAN MALES

Many of the public and private school systems do not recognize the way African American male students engage in the classroom. Further, if teachers perceive African American males as deficient, they tend to ostracize these students based on their perceived lack of social skills, like raising hands, engaging in dialogue, and following directions, thereby preventing an alarming number of African American males from being fully immersed in the learning process. Research on African American male student achievement highlights the importance of society and culture in their academic success (Hill & Pettus, 1990). Socializing African American males for educational success is critical in forging academic success and prowess for this often neglected population (Bell, 2010; Bell, 2009). Social capital as a concept has many definitions that link social networking to the advancement of individual productivity (Beale, 2010). Stanton-Salazar (1997) defines social capital as relationships with institutional agents and the networks that afford access to resources and information for social progression and the accomplishment of goals. Stanton-Salazar declare that:

Capital can be converted into socially valued resources and opportunities (e.g., emotional support, legitimized institutional roles and identities, privileged information and access to opportunities for mobility) (1997, p. 8).

The safe assumption would be that those who possess social capital are more likely to be successful in school. The notion of exclusivity for those who possess social capital is one that drastically reduces the ability for any individual who does not possess it to achieve success. In the postsecondary school setting, social capital comes in a myriad of forms, from having access to better quality schools to having the financial resources to support cultural advancement through the arts, literature and music. Research suggests that African American males who do not possess social capital are less likely to engage in classroom activities and, therefore, are subject to be characterized by teachers and school administrators as “uninvolved and unconcerned” when it comes to their educational success (Schneider & Stevenson, 1999; Salazar & Dornbusch, 1995).

In addition to possessing social capital, one might argue that African American males must equally possess cultural capital. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) suggests that cultural capital includes resources that eventually can yield students social and professional success. It exists in three forms: embodied, objectified, and institutionalized. Prudence Carter (2005) defines the three forms as follows:

Embodied cultural capital consists of schemes of appreciation and understanding – for example, a taste for certain music, art, or literature. Objectified cultural capital, inhered in such things as books, artwork, or music collections, yields specialized cultural knowledge of the ways of life of the middle and upper class; and finally, institutionalized cultural capital helps one attain professional success by attaining credentials and higher degrees.

Based on Carter’s three forms of cultural capital theory, African American males who acquire an equal balance of social and cultural capital should have the ability to code-switch and interact socially and professionally with the dominant culture, thereby, ensuring their success in the academic and professional realms.

While the disproportionate academic performance of African American males has been linked to the lack of positive role models, low-esteem, and low expectations by

schools, communities, and larger society, many education researchers have put forth several theories and philosophies to explain the educational disengagement of African American males (Bailey & Paisley, 2004; Lee & Bailey, 1997; Majors & Billson, 1992). For example, Osborne and Walker (2007) posit that “when there are negative stereotypes about the intellectual capacity of certain groups, members of that group suffer aversive consequences; group members who are most strongly identified with the stigmatized domain are those most likely to suffer the effects of the stereotype threat” (p. 563).

Societal stereotypes and negative portrayals of Black men in the media are examples of how society further perpetuates the disenfranchisement of Black men. Popular media, government entities, and other organizations regularly invoke visions of “Black males as dangerous predators, marginalized deadbeats, and generally deficient in many indicators of social acceptability” (Wilkins, 2005, p. 99). Very seldom are images of professional, educated, and stable Black men featured, studied or portrayed in the public or media (Jones & West, 2002; Polite & Davis, 1999; Roach, 2001; Trent, 1991). Consequently, a skewed perception of Black men is the result, and this view contributes to limited expectations from society and of themselves.

Educators and policy-makers can shift the academic paradigm for African American males by recognizing the forms of cultural capital that many of these students and their families possess as they navigate through the educational pipeline. Yosso’s (2005) Community Cultural Framework contests the traditional submission of Bourdieu’s cultural capital theory and suppositions an alternative theory known as community cultural wealth. Yosso (2005) highlights six forms of capital within the framework for community cultural wealth: aspirational, navigational, social, linguistic, familial and resistant capital. Yosso (2005) and Jayakumar et. al (2013) defines the forms of capital as follows:

Aspirational capital – refers to resiliency in maintaining hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers.

Linguistic capital - acknowledges the intellectual and social skills attained through communicating in more than one language. Yosso argues that because storytelling is a part of the lives of many students of color, they bring with them skills such as listening, memorization, vocal emphasis and tone and attention to detail.

Familial capital – refers to those cultural knowledges nurtured among family, which is expands to include a broader sense of community.

Navigational capital – is the ability to maneuver and negotiate social systems that were not designed for communities of color.

Social capital – refers to the social networks and communities that support communities of color.

Resistance capital – refers to the knowledge and skills developed as means to resist social injustice.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS IN THE LITERATURE

A theoretical framework is a frame of reference that is a basis for observations, definitions of concepts, research designs, interpretations, and generalizations, much as the frame that rests on a foundation defines the overall design of a house (LoBiondo-Wood & Haber, 1998, p. 141). To better understand how previous scholars framed the context for their studies, an examination of the theoretical frameworks used by scholars was conducted. A review of the literature on student persistence and academic success revealed three leading theories that guide this study: Wood's (2010) conceptual model of African American male academic success in community college, Bandura's (1977) social learning theory (self-efficacy) and Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) student integration model.

African American Male Academic Success

Studies indicated that factors associated with African American male student success at community colleges include: positive self-concept, realistic self-appraisal, understands and deals with racism, demonstrates community service, prefers long-range to short-term goals, the availability of a strong support network, successful leadership experience, and acquisition of knowledge in a field (Littleton, 2001; Latiker, 2003; Flowers, 2006; Mason, 1998).

Research has also demonstrated how programs such as peer mentors have contributed to the academic success of African American males at predominantly White universities (Fries-Britt, 1998; Harper, 2006). In addition to peer mentoring, faculty-to-student mentoring was also found to positively contribute to the academic success of African American males. In 2006, Bush and Bush found that faculty-student interaction was a correlating factor to African American male persistence and transfer rates in community college.

Wood (2010) expands on previous research by providing a conceptual model of African American male student success which suggests that academic success of African American males is influenced by four interrelated variables, 1) personal, 2) psychological, 3) academic, and 4) institutional.

The model defines each as follows:

Personal factors – transportation, life stability, family support, finances
employment religion, peer support

Psychological factors – motivation, focus, academic confidence

Academic factors – study habits, attendance, academic services

Institutional factors – collegian support, faculty engagement, social involvement,
campus climate

Wood postulated each of the aforementioned factors are interrelated and contributed to the academic success of African American males in community colleges.

Glenn's (2003) study on African American male persistence in community colleges revealed that colleges with the greater percent of African American male student persistence provided first-year experience programs which included comprehensive support services, such as mandatory orientation and academic advising, mandatory tutoring support and early-intervention programs.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory (Self-Efficacy)

Bandura's social learning theory focused on the impact between an individual's cognitive processes as influenced by social phenomena upon their actions and development (Grusec, 1992, as cited in Wood, 2010). Bandura theorizes that social phenomena, whatever the form, alter the strength of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy suggests that one's personal expectations in their ability to succeed determines "whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long coping behavior will be sustained in the face of obstacles and adverse experiences" (Bandura, 1977, pg. 191). Self-efficacy theory aptly describes that an individual's ability to anticipate future outcomes and consequences through thought, provides them a source of motivation.

Simply stated, Bolles (1972) summarizes: "...reinforcement operations affect behavior largely by creating expectations that behaving in a certain way will produce anticipated benefits or avert future difficulties" (p. 391).

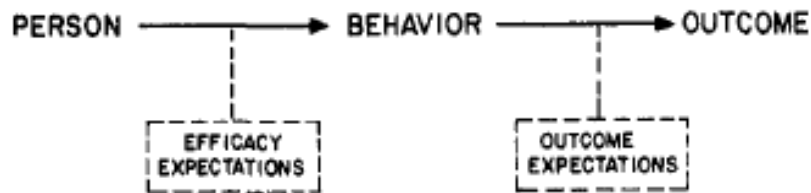


Figure 3: Self-Efficacy: Toward a Unifying Theory of Behavioral Change. Diagrammatic representation of the difference between efficacy expectations and outcome expectations. Abstracted from Bandura (1977)

In addition to positive reinforcement, goal setting and self-evaluation, also known as *efficacy expectations*, are considered to be sources of motivation (Bandura, 1977). Self-motivation involves establishing standards for performance by which an individual may measure their progress. These standards are also known as *outcome expectations*. The results of the self-evaluation, whether successful or unsuccessful, will either motivate corrective action in behavior or induce satisfaction of desired accomplishments (Bandura, 1977).

Self-efficacy is based on four major sources of information: performance accomplishments, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion, and emotional arousal. Performance accomplishments are based on personal achievement and mastery of experience, and expectations are varied based on success or failures; vicarious experience proposes that personal expectations are derived from seeing others successfully accomplish a goal or task; verbal persuasion leads people by suggesting they can overcome barriers they may have encountered in the past; and emotional arousal will have a varying effect on efficacy based on the level of anxiety and vulnerability (Bandura & Barab, 1973).

The principal thought on the relationships between expectations and motivations was well-summarized by Bandura who used evidence capably to theorize that students

who intrinsically value the learning experience are believed to engage in academic activities purely for the internal satisfaction of working on the task. Other researchers who studied the motivation of African American male students reached similar conclusions that African American male students with high levels of intrinsic motivation have greater achievement drive than students who operate with high levels of external motivation (Elliot, 1995; Young, 2008).

Tinto's Student Integration Model

The second theory guiding this research study was Vincent Tinto's (1975) model of student integration. This model is one of the most popular and widely cited theoretical perspectives regarding student persistence. Tinto posited that students are more likely to persist in college if they assimilate with the social and academic life of that institution. Students who become integrated into a college by developing relationships with faculty, staff, and peers, participating in college activities, or engaging in academic activities, are more likely to persist than those who remain on the periphery. Tinto's analysis carried forth the clear logical assumptions that student integration into an institution can occur in the academic realm, the social realm, or a combination of both.

Academic integration occurs when students become attached to the intellectual life of the college, while social integration occurs when students create relationships and connections outside of the classroom. These two concepts, though analytically distinct, interact with and enhance one another. And, while students must be integrated into the institution along both dimensions to increase their likelihood of persistence, they need not be equally integrated along the two. (as cited by Karp, Hughes, O'Gara, 2008, p. 38)

Dabney-Smith (2009) cited four major conclusions about student persistence based on Tinto's theoretical assumptions:

1. Encouragement and support can ease a student's transition from high school to college in all phases of the student's college life;

2. Varied sources of encouragement and support should come from faculty, staff, parents, and peers;
3. Academic and social experiences in college are influenced by the degree of support from others, and
4. Student commitment to attaining a degree is not only related to integration into the university, but also the level of support and encouragement they receive from others (p. 23).

These assumptions provided a foundation to analyze the data collected in this study of the perceptions of which academic and student services structures have been built by community college administrators to support the academic success of African American male students in an urban setting in Texas.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

Research models by Bandura and others have guided this research on high-achieving African American male students who excelled academically because of confluence of variables. For many of these students, self-determination, family and community support are instrumental in their motivation to succeed. Despite the dismal position that many African American male students find themselves in, within the educational system, there are stories of success. The next chapter discusses the methodology used for this qualitative research study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This chapter begins with a recap of the purpose of the study and research questions. It includes an explanation of the research design, followed by a description of the selected site and sample population. Also included in this chapter is a description of the process to select participants and data collection, data collection instruments, data collection process, and data analysis. The chapter concludes with a summary of the methodology that was used for this study.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore high-achieving African American male community college students' perceptions concerning their pre-college and college experiences which might have contributed to their academic success.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research questions were:

1. What secondary school experiences do high-achieving African American males perceive as contributing to their academic success?
2. What personal experiences do high-achieving African American males perceive as contributing to their academic success in a large urban community college?
3. What institutional programs or services do high-achieving African American males perceive as contributing to their academic success in a large urban community college?

These research questions covered a broad spectrum of issues, areas, and experiences that may have influenced, shaped or framed high-achieving African American male students' perceptions about their educational experiences in community college.

RESEARCH METHOD

A qualitative research methodology was used for this investigation to explore “the influence of attitudes, beliefs, and values of high -achieving African American male community college students” (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 41). Qualitative methods are used in research to gain an in-depth understanding and detailed description of a particular phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The goal of this study was to understand how African American male students were able to successfully navigate through their educational journeys and achieve academic success.

Following the interpretivist paradigm, a qualitative approach was used for this study in an effort to allow the researcher to denote the experiences and perspectives of study participants. This process allowed the researcher and participants to construct reality together through various data gathering techniques (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative research involves exploring and describing, in the natural context of study participants, thus enabling the researcher to gain a personal perspective of their experiences. Given that qualitative research design embraces five major design traditions that include biography, phenomenology, grounded theory study, ethnography, and case study, each design attempts to gain understanding of a “social or human problem” (Creswell, 1998, p. 15). Therefore, I believed a qualitative approach was best suited to focus on African American male student perceptions about their educational experiences in community college and how those experiences influenced their academic success in a large community college.

While a qualitative research methodology allows in-depth analysis of a phenomenon, generalizability of findings is limited in comparison to quantitative research methodology. However, in this study, generalizability was not of particular concern because the study was not designed to provide a universal truth regarding perceptions of all African American males or all community college students, but rather it was designed to provide insight within a specific context. In addition, researcher bias, which may come in the form of data analysis and interpretation, is a concern for qualitative researchers. Bodgan & Biklen (1982) contend that the

researcher's primary goal is to expand knowledge without invoking prejudice or passing judgment on the setting. Conversely, my role as a community college administrator allowed reflexive advantages that provided greater access and insight for the interpretation and analysis of the participant responses.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Qualitative studies are framed by descriptions of, explanations for, or meanings of a phenomena by the researcher and the participants. For this reason, qualitative researchers have come to value the importance of case studies (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Yin, 2009). A case study is an examination of specific phenomenon, such as a program, an event, a person, an institution or a social group (Merriam, 1988). Characteristic to case studies is that they allow for dense descriptions and emerging themes within a specific context or setting (Creswell, 1998). They refer to the collection and presentation of detailed information about participants, frequently including the accounts of the subjects themselves, and seek to answer the questions of how and why, instead of who, what, where, and how many (Stake, 1995).

Case Study Method

Yin (2012) suggests that using the case study approach provides the researcher the opportunity to examine various data sources such as documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant observation, and physical artifacts. Yin (1994) explains that the case study method of inquiry examines the importance and depth of life experiences. The central tendency among all types of case studies is that they try to illuminate a decision or set of decisions: why they were taken, how they were implemented, and with what result (Schramm, 1971).

In an effort to investigate African American male students' perceptions and experiences related to their success in a particular community college, I utilized a single case study approach. This approach enabled me to contextualize the findings. As noted by Merriam (1988), "By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity ('the case'), this approach aims to uncover the

interaction of significant factors characteristic of the phenomenon. The case study seeks holistic description and explanation” (p. 10). Focusing on one community college enabled me to better understand how the context may have influenced African American male success in the site selected. Further, the exploratory structure of this study allowed me to have exclusive one-on-one, in-depth discussions with student participants to better understand what African American male students talk about in public, as well as the more sensitive topics they discuss only in private and, perhaps, would not disclose on a questionnaire.

Site Selection and Participants

The site for this study was Houston Community College (HCC) located in Houston, Texas. Houston Community College is an open-admission institution with a mission focused on offering an affordable education for academic advancement, workforce training and career development. HCC’s serves as a higher education pipeline to seven-area independent school districts. The institution was founded in 1971 and governed by the Houston Independent School District as a result of a public referendum to provide affordable access to higher education for residents of Houston (www.hcc.edu, 2017). HCC is comprised of six colleges strategically located throughout the greater Houston. The college offers a wide variety of academic and workforce programs, as well as adult education and continuing education programs. Additionally, HCC provides an array of student services such as admissions and registration, counseling, advising, testing, student life, as well as programs focused on special populations such as ability services, veterans and international students.

The annual student enrollment at HCC is estimated to be approximately 100,000, with African American students comprising approximately 30% of the total student population. Of the total African American student population, African American males comprise approximately 35%, while African American females comprise approximately 64%. Nationally, HCC ranks second among two-year institutions for awarding associate degrees to African Americans;

however approximately 70% of the degrees awarded to African Americans go to African American females (Community College Week, 2015).

In 2006, HCC administrators established a Minority Male Initiative (MMI) program in an effort to curtail the declining enrollment and graduation rates of its male students of color. Since the implementation of the MMI program, HCC has hosted a series of events such as summer STEM camps and activities aimed at increasing engagement, persistence, and graduation rates for African American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Hispanic male students (HCC Campus Document, 2015).

Participants

Qualitative research methodology typically focuses on small samples and is useful when selecting information-rich cases that illuminate the research questions (Patton, 2001). Further, criterion sampling, involving selecting participants based on a set of criteria, was used for selecting participants (Patton, 2001). For this study, three criteria were used to identify six participants: (1) African American, (2) male, with a cumulative grade point average of 3.5 or higher, and (3) completed at least 30-semester credit hours of an academic degree program. Criterion sampling allows the researcher to study cases that meet some predetermined criteria of importance (Patton, 2002). In addition to criterion sampling, purposeful random sampling was used to identify information-rich cases. Patton (2002) suggests that random sampling does not ensure a representative sample, therefore, to obtain a more representative sampling, participants are purposefully selected using a combination of convenience and snowball sampling, along with computer-generated lists of potential study participants.

A request made to the community college's institutional research department provided a list containing contact information of students who met the participant selection criteria. Students from the list were emailed a letter of introduction and a participant response form (Appendix A). In addition to specifying the initial selection criteria, the letter of introduction specified additional criteria required to participate, which included student self-identification as being

actively involved in extracurricular activities and planning to transfer to a four-year university. Once the participants were identified, students received a follow up email that included information about confidentiality and purpose of the study, along with a participant consent form.

Data Collection

The interview questions for this study were based on topics related to student integration and social learning, as derived from a review of relevant literature. Researchers Bodgan and Biklen (1982) define data as “rough materials researchers collect from the world they are studying; they are the particulars that form the basis of analysis” (pg. 73). While there are a variety of data collection methods in qualitative research, semi-structured individual interviews, observations, field notes, document reviews and journal notes were used for this study.

Tinto’s (1975) student integration model and Bandura’s (1987) Social Learning Theory served as the foundation for this study’s interview protocol that contained academic and social integration constructs of Tinto’s and Bandura’s theoretical models. The academic integration construct was measured in this study by grade point average (GPA) and the number of transferable courses completed by the participants. The social integration construct included questions related to individual perceptions’ of participants, as well as the impact of internal and external support systems on African American male students’ academic successes.

Individual interviews were used to collect data for this study. Glesne (2006) indicates that a semi-structured interview is appropriate for qualitative research because it allows new questions to be formulated and addressed throughout the process. Additionally, Seidman (1998) indicates, “interviews allow researchers to put behavior into context and provides access to understanding participants’ actions” (p. 4). Interview questions were designed to allow for exploration of African American male students’ perceptions about their educational experiences, thereby, providing an opportunity for participants to share their stories in a safe setting. A subsequent interview was scheduled with individual participants in order to clarify or correct

content from the first interview, and to allow participants the opportunity to add new data to the interview transcript. Six students from the selected participants participated in the interviews. The open-ended interview approach allowed the researcher to build upon and explore the participants' responses to the questions (Siedman, 1998). An interview guide was used to explore common themes among participants (Patton, 2002). A copy of the interview guide is included in Appendix B.

Data Collection Process

Prior to collecting data for this study, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at HCC, the college for which the study was being conducted, and The University of Texas at Austin, the university where the researcher was affiliated. After IRB approval was received from both institutions, a data set was requested from the Office of Institutional Research at the selected site. The data set included directory contact information for students who met the selection criteria, in an effort to solicit their participation. Once student information was received, I contacted the Student Life Department at the site to solicit assistance with sending emails to students. Additionally, announcements were posted in student common areas at the site's two largest campuses, in an effort to identify participants. A follow-up phone call or email was sent to students who elected to participate to confirm their eligibility and interest. I was responsible for answering all questions related to the study. Interview times were based on student availability and range from 8:30 a.m. – 7:00 p.m. Interviews were approximately 90 minutes in length and two interviews were held with each participant.

The researcher scheduled all interviews. Prior to each individual interview, each participant received a demographic data form and an informed consent form. Eligible participants were asked to bring their completed forms to their assigned interview. Additional forms were available onsite in the event students forgot to submit their information prior to the interviews. A meeting room was secured at the site by the researcher where individual interviews were conducted. To expedite the data collection process, interviews were held during the course

of one week. To ensure that interview questions were easily understandable, the researcher conducted a pilot study of the semi-structured interview process with two students from the pool of interested participants. According to Light, Singer, and Willett (1990), “no design is ever so complete that it cannot be improved by a prior, small-scale exploratory study” (p. 213). Each participant (including those who participate in the pilot study) was offered a \$10 gift card redeemable for purchases on campus at Barnes & Noble bookstore.

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher in this study becomes essential to the reliability and credibility of this study. The researcher’s role for this study was one of an action researcher, since I am an administrator interested in academic persistence and success of African American males enrolled at the institution. Stringer (1999) states that the role of an action researcher is to serve as a ‘catalyst’ to help people analyze their situation, consider findings, plan how to keep what they want, and change what they do not like. To date, no study has been conducted at the institution that examines high-achieving African American male student perceptions about factors that contribute to their success. To avoid researcher bias, a journal and field notes were maintained throughout the course of the study. Researcher bias refers to how assumptions and preconceptions of the researcher may impact the integrity of the participation selection process, individual interviews, and data analysis (Robson, 2002). The potential for researcher bias must always be a consideration. In this case, the researcher’s position within the institution may have influenced the perceived assumptions of the participants. As a community college administrator, I recognized my assumption that community colleges provide a gateway to higher education for many at-risk populations. Additionally, I assumed that African American males may have a tendency to navigate higher education at a greater level of success as a result of starting their educational journeys at a community college. As the researcher, I understood the limitations of the methodology and was committed to embracing the study in an unbiased and professional manner; however, any biases were noted and set aside as the study results were analyzed.

Data Analysis

The data analysis for this study included coding, categorizing, and identifying common themes found in each of the individual interview transcripts. Creswell (2009) asserts that “data analysis involves collecting open-ended data based on asking general questions and developing an analysis from the information supplied by the participants” (p. 43). The researcher followed six steps to find meaning beyond the interview transcript. The six steps involved “(1) reading and re-reading the interview transcripts and notes, (2) initial noting of thoughts in descriptive, linguistic, or conceptual format, noting themes on transcript and open-mindedly reviewing and noting information gathered, (3) developing emergent themes, (4) searching for connections across emergent themes, (5) moving to the next case, and (6) looking for patterns across cases” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009 pg. 79). Following each individual interview, audiotapes were transcribed and hand-coded line by line to identify emerging themes. Open coding is used in an effort to systematically organize the data so that the researcher is able to interpret and utilize the collected material. Open coding involves “breaking down, examining, conceptualizing and categorizing data (Straus & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) is utilized to facilitate the coding process.

Themes and patterns within the data were coded and analyzed using the theoretical frameworks of the study, which includes Vincent Tinto’s Student Integration Model, Bandura’s Social Learning Theory, and Critical Race Theory. Triangulation of data was accomplished by using individual interviews, document analysis, researcher field notes, and institutional data. Since data triangulation involves using multiple data sources in an investigation to produce understanding (Denzin, 1978). It helped the researcher corroborate findings and test validity. All participants are asked to discuss the same topic over time. These approaches contributed to the process by which information obtained can be compared and cross-verified for consistency (Patton, 2002).

Credibility and Validity

The final stage of qualitative analysis, as suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), was verification. The process of verification not only involves ensuring that data collection and analysis methods are consistent and reliable, but also that the data accurately represents the intended meanings and perceptions of the participants (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Thoroughness contributes to the validity of the study by ensuring the researcher is closely involved with all components of the investigation and invests sufficient time in the field and with the data (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). To ensure integrity of the data, credibility was established by “member checks”, which allowed the participants access to their interview transcript so they may corroborate the researcher’s interpretations or identify any unintended interpretations. Member checks involve verbally reviewing the data with the participants to ensure the intended meaning was captured (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Marshall and Rossman (2011) believe this process provides the researcher with a way to ask the participants if he “got it right” (p. 221). I provided each of the interviewees access to the transcript. They confirmed for me that the data I collected was accurate. After they reviewed the material, I went over the transcript and masked out data that would personally identify each respondent. The original transcripts are maintained in a secure location in my possession. My supervisor and committee members did not receive the names or addresses of my interviewees. I sorted out the data by African American males, and international males, and reviewed the data for African American males separately from data related to Black males. The data for each of these groups was reported separately in the next chapter on the findings of this research.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter outlines the research methodology by restating the purpose of the study and the questions to be answered. The design of this qualitative research study was presented and followed by a description of the participants and site location selected. Lastly, the data collection and analysis procedures were discussed.

Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore African American male community college students' perceptions concerning their pre-college and college educational experiences which may have contributed to their success. Each of the six participants provided abundant information about their perceptions of the types of academic, personal, and institutional experiences that led to their present academic success. The participants represented diverse cultural backgrounds and majors. All of the participants planned to transfer to four-year institutions to complete their upper-level coursework associated with a program of study. Each participant articulated specific degree and career paths. Most of the participants were employed at least part-time by the start of their second semester at HCC, and all are employed at the conclusion of this study.

Individual interviews were arranged to accommodate each participants' schedule and were held in conference rooms at the two locations within the college. I selected four of the students after responding to the flyer soliciting African American male participants for the study. Flyers were placed in student lounges and common meeting spaces at three HCC campuses. Two participants were selected after attending an information meeting held regarding the purpose of the study. Once the participants were identified, I scheduled initial meetings to remind them about the purpose of the study, and to collect their Participant Response and Consent to Participate in the Research forms.

I was mindful to select students who were eager to participate in the study. The researcher surprised that three of the students who volunteered to join the study had shown some confusion about the meaning of the term "Africa American". These students were not excluded from the study for several reasons. First, it was easy to distinguish the African American students from the Black males in the college-preparatory part of the study because the students were very comfortable talking about their pre-college backgrounds. Secondly, the narratives collected from all six years were remarkably the same for the college-related perceptions, so the

investigator could not offer a reason to exclude half of the data. For example, all six students were included in the same courses and college databases. The international students even self-identified as African American. Thirdly, to avoid misunderstanding by the readers of this study, the investigator decided to use the term “Black male” to signal that the data in that part of the study applied to one of the three international students.

This chapter presents relevant findings which address three research questions: 1) What secondary school experiences do high-achieving African American male students perceive as contributing to their academic success? 2) What personal experiences do high-achieving African American male students perceive as contributing to their academic success in community college? 3) What institutional programs and services do high-achieving African American male students perceive as contributing to their academic success in community college?

Given the purpose of the study, it was relevant to clarify the meaning of experiences. Merriam Webster (2017) defines experience as “a direct observation of or participation in events as a basis of knowledge; the conscious events that make up an individual’s life.” For the purpose of this study, experience is defined as understanding, engagement or involvement in conscious events that make up an individual’s life. The research themes that emerge from the findings are presented in this chapter. In the next part of this chapter I will discuss the findings in three parts. First, I will present the data that similarly applied to all six male students. This group profile should inform the readers of this study with a group report on the shared characteristics and perceptions of the six students. Secondly, I will provide short summaries of the characteristics and narratives of each of the students. The information about the students has been only slightly altered to protect their confidentiality and to comply with the policies of the community college respecting student privacy. Thirdly, I will analyze the profiles for shared characteristics and themes. I complete this chapter on findings with brief discussions of how the themes relate to the three research questions underpinning this study.

GROUP PROFILE OF SIX HIGH-ACHIEVING AFRICAN AMERICAN/BLACK MALE STUDENTS

The study of the perceptions of six male students in a college located in the Southeast portion of Texas took place during spring 2016. As a group, the male students shared various interesting characteristics. All were high-achieving students as demonstrated by his cumulative grade point averages ranging from 3.57 to 4.0.

Students discussed their plans to transfer to a four-year institution upon graduating from HCC. Each shared specific degree and career paths. Participants spoke candidly and enthusiastically about their higher education experience. None professed to have accomplished their educational goals, so far, without having received some level of assistance, either emotionally, financially, or institutionally. The researcher will discuss in the next section how the African American/Black male students differed in their experiences and perceptions. Some of the differences were minor, but the details were so rich and inspiring to the researcher that I decided to include them to more fully document the perceptions of the male students.

INDIVIDUAL PROFILES OF STUDY PARTICIPANTS

This section summarizes the personal narrative of each of study participant. Their stories depict the educational journeys of six high-achieving African American and Black male students whose lives have been influenced and shaped by their family structure, school experiences, and other personal life events. As mentioned before in the methodology portion of this study, the specific data has been slightly modified to protect the confidentiality of individual students.

“I.N.”

I.N. is a second-year student who has been very active in student organizations on campus. He is highly respected among his peers, as he was elected to serve as an officer to a large student organization with the responsibility to oversee student concerns over six areas of the college district. He was articulate and often encouraged feedback about his leadership from his peers.

My first encounter with I.N. was during a focus group that was engaged to provide input to the administration about campus-wide services and programs. His demeanor was soft-spoken and reserved. He listened to the dialogue, observed the responses of his peers, and occasionally offered feedback. At the end of the focus group, I.N. recapped the conversation and provided salient points on behalf of the rest of the group for the administration to consider. I was quite surprised when he responded to the solicitation flyer and agreed to participate in the study. I interviewed him and was intrigued by the complexity of his life story and how he viewed education as a vehicle to change his personal and family trajectory.

Born in West Africa, I.N. was the oldest of several children raised by their aunt and uncle. While in primary school, his grandmother decided that she wanted a better life for him and his siblings so she sent them to live with their aunt and uncle in another city in West Africa. He described his family background; stating,

For the first several years of my life, me and my siblings were raised primarily by my grandmother. My parents had issues so they were not the most reliable. After some time, my grandmother decided it would be better for us to experience a better life, so we had to move to live with my aunt and her husband.

He attended a private school where he had very little interaction with counselors about college exploration. Instead, he had conversations with his peers and family members to discuss his future goals and how he would need to attend college to achieve them.

Back home there was no pre-college experience per se. It's just you getting done with high school and fending for yourself. Counselors didn't talk much about going to college. What you do with yourself is up to you.

College is only an option for the financially elite. I.N. portrayed the college admission process as extremely complex and political:

In West Africa, after secondary school, you are supposed to take the state exam. If you do well, you can make the average school but before you make it through, that still didn't guarantee admittance to college. You have institutions whereby you have people admitting people they know, so you have "false admissions" sometimes. There was so much bribery and corruption over there. You could see a student doing well on the exam and at the end of the day, he's not in school and you wonder what's going on? It's not the student, most of the time it was the school. Sometimes, it didn't matter how well you

performed on the entrance exam, some people were given preference based on personal relationships.

Despite the political challenges involved in the college admission process, I.N. decided to pursue his dream and began the process of applying to college. A process that spanned over a three-year period, with a disappointing outcome:

I was trying to get into college after graduating secondary school and it was a time of torture for me. I attended tutorials prior to taking entrance exam, not because I needed to but because the system was designed to force you to take them. I finally got into college after three years of waiting and going through the process, only to be told two months later that I had to withdraw because my registration photo was too small. My photo was small because my aunt and I took the photo and scanned it from home. When I submitted my documents for the entrance exam, the person who was in the exam hall told me that my photo was okay and that it would not be a problem, but when it was time for me to register for classes, I was told that I should withdraw.

He explained how his aunt felt responsible for his dilemma because she had helped him prepare his documents. She insisted on helping him, but I.N. was frustrated by the political nature of the education system and decided he needed to pursue a higher degree in the U.S. He was motivated by an aunt who was living in the United States and had achieved success with obtaining her degree and working in the medical field, so he decided to apply for college at the local community college where she had also attended. He successfully applied and was admitted to HCC where he decided to pursue a degree in nursing as a first-step toward medical school. When asked why he was so persistent in his pursuits of higher education, he responded:

I didn't want to settle for less. My father didn't go to college; he stopped going to school after primary school. My mom went further than that but it was pretty much like a high school degree. I saw them struggle and I don't want to make my kids go through that. There is no inheritance for my siblings and me. A high school diploma can't take you nowhere, you have to go further to reach the degree.

Overall, I was able to understand the long path I.N. took to include much of his family in preparing for his college experience. He compared his hopes and expectations for college to the meager dreams and expectations of members of his family.

“D.K.”

D.K. was a perfect example of how the community college may provide a second chance for individuals interested in changing their lives through education. Born and raised in Southeast Texas in a two-parent household, D.K. grew up around drugs, violence and guns. While he grew up with both parents in the household, he indicated that his home environment was not ideal.

I grew up in a two-parent household where alcohol, drug abuse, and aggression was a part of my daily life. I witnessed drug transactions at the age of six.

Drugs were so prevalent in his surroundings that he eventually succumbed to the pressure of dealing. At a very young age, he started selling drugs in the apartment complex where he lived. It was at the same time he began using drugs, specifically marijuana. D.K. attended a high school that was comprised primarily of African American and Hispanic students. He shared his love for football and how his skills eventually led to several scholarship offers. He accepted a full scholarship to attend a small college out of state but only stayed for two weeks for reasons he identified as insecurity and lifestyle changes.

When I got the opportunity to go to college, I was uncomfortable in the college scene. At the time, I had lost my love for football. I was insecure in the college surrounding because I had become so accustomed to being the smartest person in the group, plus I missed the lifestyle I had when I was selling drugs.

D.K. returned to the life he knew in Southeast Texas, which ended up almost costing him his life. At a very young age he was injured during a violent home invasion, leaving him with a physical disability for the rest of his life. He reflected on the turning point in his life that ultimately led him back to college:

While I was in the hospital, I talked to God and told Him I wanted to give my life back to Him. I made the decision to go back to school to be a counselor. This time, I returned to school with a meaning and a purpose, with the ambition and determination, because now I know what I'm supposed to do and how I'm supposed to do it.

By the time he made his religious decision to turn his life around, D.K. was a single father, committed himself to fulfill his purpose of serving God by finishing college and pursuing a counseling career. Clearly, he wanted to make the most of his college experience. He was highly regarded among faculty and the administration at the campus where he worked part-time in one

of the student support services departments. He was active in several student organizations and served as a mentor to other students, particularly African American male students on campus.

“D.E.”

Born in the West Indies, D.E. was one of several children in his family raised by their maternal grandmother. He described his family as being the cornerstone of his educational foundation. Even though his mother and father never raised him, DE credited his family for supporting him in his pathway to academic success. He gave generous praise to his aunts, uncles and grandmother for his accomplishments in college. He did not come from a wealthy family, but saw his family members as being his strongest advocates to attend college. He viewed the opportunity to study in the United States as a once in a lifetime opportunity. He was mature and goal-oriented. When asked to elaborate on his ambitions, D.E. responded:

I have always been goal-oriented. I knew what I wanted to do. Upon completion of high school, I gave myself three options: college, police officer, or food and beverage. Turns out that the opportunity presented itself for me to attend college in the United States, so I jumped at the chance.

Although he had not decided on a major prior to enrolling in HCC, he knew it would be important to advancing his college and professional career. He explained that he researched his options before meeting with the international student advisor and decided to pursue computer science. He proudly proclaimed he had a passion for computers and technology and thought it would be an easy option for him. When asked why he chose computer science as his major, D.E. replied:

I looked at how much it pays. To me that is important because you take out student loans but have a degree where you don't make enough money to pay off the loans. The pay is a great motivation.

D.E. is completed his final semester at HCC after two and a half years and had already been accepted into a tier-one, four-year institution in the state of Texas, and had started working part-time for a local software engineering firm. He has adjusted to college life and is living in the United States quite well. He is an active member of the Alumni Association, and had been

honored by his peers who elected him to a prestigious role representing alumni. He was extremely proud of his active role in his alumni group.

To summarize, DE's narrative contained dramatic barriers and obstacles, but also contained equally distinctive recoveries, as he trekked towards his goals of academic and social success.

“LML”

A self-proclaimed geek, LML was born and raised in Southeast Texas, in an area where residents have been historically under-employed and less educated. He was the only child of his African American mother and White Jewish father. He joked about his heritage during the initial interview:

The first thing people would ask me when they saw me, ‘What’s your ethnicity?’ People get confused. I tell them my mom is African American and my dad’s Jewish, so people would tease me and say, so “you’re Drake”. I will say this though, at times I felt like I had to fight to be black and there were times when I had to fight not to be Black. It was such a battle to be Black but to say that doesn't mean that I have to succumb to the stereotype of the Black male”.

LML was very articulate and determined. He attended a well-known private high school on a scholarship. He portrayed the experience as challenging and highly competitive.

There were no breaks at the high school I attended. Homework was mandatory, not optional, and on top of that we had a huge required reading list.

LML graduated from high school in the top 10% of his class and was awarded a full academic scholarship to attend college out-of-state. The scholarship covered the cost of tuition, fees and books. He was excited about the possibility of getting his bachelor’s degree, even though his mother had an associate’s degree. He would be the first in his family to achieve this level of success. He attended school for one semester only to find out that he would have to return to Texas because his mother could no longer afford to help him pay for housing, meals, and others costs not covered by the scholarship. This setback was so disappointing to LML that he was estranged from his mother. He was also estranged from his father. He lived with a relative.

When asked how he ended up at HCC, LML indicated that the campus was in close proximity to his home and, since he didn't have transportation, it was an easy walk to class. He admitted that he was skeptical at first about attending a community college because of all the negative connotations associated with two-year schools; however, after enrolling, he was surprised and to some extent relieved. He found the instructors and coursework to be comparable to that of the four-year school he had previously attended. LML was also active in several student organizations and is a familiar face on the small campus where he attends classes. His career goal was to become an aerospace engineer. LML worked two part-time jobs to help pay for his tuition and save money for a car.

“Jay Wallace”

During my initial interaction with the student who selected the pseudonym “Jay Wallace,” or “Jay,” I observed him to be reserved and guarded. After engaging in small talk about Louisiana and discovering that we had several mutual passions about the state, primarily food and football, he became more relaxed and opened up quite a bit. Born in a small town in north Louisiana. The youngest child in his family, Jay had an older brother and sister who graduated from college master's degrees. His mother worked at a large retail chain in town and his father earned his wages by performing day-labor. He enjoyed high school and talked about Friday night football, after-parties, and hanging out with his friends. Upon graduating from high school, Jay enrolled in one of the local universities in town. Here he recalled how enrolling in the “White” institution was a mistake for him.

I enrolled my freshman year and decided to major in kinesiology, but then changed to business. I ended up dropping out altogether because it became too much for me to handle. I never felt connected to the college at all.

After dropping out of college, Jay worked several jobs at local businesses in town. It would be four years before Jay would return to college. He moved to Houston at the encouragement of an older sibling and decided to give college another try. This time, he enrolled in HCC, a decision he made after driving past one of the campuses every day for a year, back

and forth to his part-time warehouse job. After speaking to an advisor over the phone, he discovered he had earned enough college credit to where he only needed 18 semester credit hours at HCC to be awarded his associate's degree in business administration. Jay recounted his amazement at the efficiency of the community college as follows:

I don't know if it was because I had already earned so many credits and had been through this process of enrolling in school or what, but I literally applied for financial aid, submitted my transcripts, chose my classes and enrolled. It may have taken one week from start to finish. That never happened at my previous college. I had to run from building to building across campus, sit in long lines even after I had my advising appointment scheduled. This was so much easier.

Even though Jay was only at HCC for one semester, he portrayed the campus as very diverse and welcoming, "it was completely unlike my previous institution." During the semester at HCC, Jay became a member of one of the honor societies and was involved in the Men of Honor peer-mentoring program. At the time of the interview, Jay was poised to enroll at a local HBCU where he had already been accepted and awarded a partial scholarship. Jay, a single father of one daughter, talked passionately about setting an example for his daughter. He stated, "I want her to see me do it. When she comes home from school, we both sit at the kitchen table and do homework together."

To summarize, Jay was reticent at first about telling his narrative but he opened up in great detail. Of all the students interviewed, he provided the most specific details about the processes and services that made the most difference to him resuming his college work. He was very aware that the services and programs played a direct role in his being able to transfer to a four-year institution of higher education.

"Margaric"

Smargarboi was a very energetic and enthusiastic young man. Born in a family of five in a small rural village in West Africa, Smargarboi grew up understanding the importance of higher education. His mother was a high school teacher and his father was the Dean of Education for the local high school. He took great pride in how his parents ensured that he and his siblings had the

best education available to them. He felt that he and his siblings were held to a higher level of accountability because their parents were respected educators in the community.

Back home, if your parents were educators, people looked up to you to be the best because your parents are educators. My parents always told us that the way we could pay them back was to be good students in school. When it came to education, my dad was very serious. Where we are from, most people did not complete school, so my parents always made sure that we took care of our studies.

Attending college was a concrete, non-negotiable expectation, and not an option in Smargarboi's family. His parents constantly instilled the notion of attending college as a number one priority. Having parents who understood the value of education made it easier for Smargarboi to explore all the academic options available to him. Smargarboi remembered that when he expressed his desire to attend college in the United States his parents committed to making his dream come true. As Smargarboi reflected on his mother's personal and financial sacrifice to fund his college goals, his eyes welled with emotion. He explained, "I am sure a lot of parents would have done the same for their children, but this was my mom's entire life savings and she sacrificed it for me to be able to pursue my goals."

Smargarboi first learned of HCC from a Houston-based family member who was a graduate of HCC. While Smargarboi was still living in West Africa his family member often discussed the process involved in getting a student visa and securing sponsorship in order to become a student. Smargarboi recalled these conversations as follows: "I told my uncle I wanted to learn about schools in the U.S., so he sent me a bunch of web links to different schools in the area." He proffered details about how he researched several institutions before deciding to attend HCC. He reached a decision to relocate to the U.S. jointly with his uncle: "One thing about coming over here, I didn't know anybody and I wanted to go to a place that would give me more direct attention, so my uncle and I agreed that HCC was the best fit." In Smargarboi's first semester, he majored in business administration but later changed his major to nursing in the hopes of being able to provide assistance to his ill father back home.

In Smargarboi's first year at Houston Community College, his father died due to complications from diabetes. It was a devastating loss to him and his family but it did not hinder his ability to achieve success. In addition to his sorrow at losing his father he admitted he also experienced what he perceived as cultural challenges during his first semester. I asked him to elaborate and he stated, "I always thought I spoke very good English, but when I came to HCC, I found it difficult for me to understand my professors. I was worried that I would not be able to keep up." He recounted how he would listen very closely to his instructors and read an increasing number of books in order to improve his English. His command of the English language improved to the degree that he eventually built up the confidence to seek employment through the Optional Practical Training (OPT) program for international students. Smargarboi perceived that the academic preparation at HCC prepared him for acceptance as a part-time surgical technician at one of the largest hospital systems in Southeast Texas. Along with his academic grade point average above 3.5, Smargarboi reported that he had quickly adjusted to the academic climate of the institution and felt quite comfortable with his classes and his job. He had been invited to join two honor societies at the college.

While Smargarboi was not born in the U.S., he presented many of the same characteristics and aspirations of the other five interviewees. He delivered numerous detailed items of information regarding the services and programs that were available to him at the community college, and carefully connected those services and programs to the progress he made in his academic work.

Next, I will turn to the analysis of trends and patterns regarding the academic success of the six interviewees. Before turning to how the findings of this study answered the three research questions, I will look at the influence of family figures on the six male students.

ANALYSIS OF INDIVIDUAL PROFILES

The six participants experienced divergent paths; however, all have a desire to achieve not only academic success but professional and financial success as well. Table 1 provides

insight about the participant family income levels. Although two of the participants are identified as either upper middle class or middle class, it can be assumed that family income levels had no adverse impact on academic achievement among the study participants. The same assumption can be made about the data in Table 2. Four of the participants had parental figures who had completed an associate's degree or higher; however, the participants whose parental figures did not have degrees were equally as motivated to achieve academic success.

Participant's Pseudonym	Income Level of Household
DE	Lower
DK	Lower
Jay Wallace	Lower
IN	Upper Middle
LML	Lower
Smargarboi	Middle

Table 1: Participant and Income Level of Household

Participant's Pseudonym	Parental Figure(s)	Parental Education Level
DE	Grandmother Aunt	Grandmother – 8 th grade Aunt – Bachelor degree
DK	Mother and Father	Mother – High School Father- High School
Jay Wallace	Mother and Father	Mother – High school Father- High School
IN	Aunt and Uncle	Aunt- Bachelor degree Uncle – Advanced degree
LML	Mom Great-Aunt	Mom – Associate degree Great Aunt – High school
Smargarboi	Mother and Father	Mother- Bachelor degree Father –Bachelor degree

Table 2: Participant, Parental Figures and Parental Education Level

The data presented in Tables 1 and 2 depict the differences in family structure, socio-economic status and parental educational levels of the study participants; however, the next section of this chapter highlights the commonalities among the participants as detailed in the emergent themes that were gleaned from the individual interviews.

EMERGENT THEMES

After reviewing the notes and interview transcripts, a total of ten major themes emerged from the data related to the perceived experiences that positively contribute to the academic success of the six African American male participants in this study. Several patterns relate to self-efficacy, support systems, and institutional support, which was consistent with the literature review.

FINDINGS BY RESEARCH QUESTION

The findings in this study provide insight regarding the varied experiences of six high-achieving African American/Black male students in community colleges. Excerpts from the individual interviews are presented to illustrate the attributes of each theme.

Research Question 1: Secondary School Experiences Contributing to Academic Success

The participants highlighted the secondary school experiences they viewed as positively contributing to their academic success. Each of the young men in the study consistently elucidated activities, programs and events that prepared them for college. They all discussed how they interacted with their high school peers and how those interactions influenced their decisions to attend college.

Preparation for College While in Secondary School

The six students perceived that they achieved an acceptable level of preparation for college, utilizing a variety of techniques, approaches relationships, tools, and devices. Each of the students was asked about the value and importance of college and pointed out the programs, activities, events and conversations that contributed to their academic success. Even though three of the participants attended high school outside of the United States, they articulated similar interactions and activities they felt prepared them for the college experience.

In an effort to understand what secondary school experiences may have contributed to the success of the participants, each of the students were asked to describe the activities, experiences or circumstances that helped prepare them for college. While none of the participants describe

their involvement in traditional college preparatory programs, such as dual credit, concurrent college enrollment, or early college high schools, two participants describe how they were impacted by class visits from professionals or para-professionals. Only one of the six participants had taken Advanced Placement (AP) courses while in high school; however, the international students did not indicate that advance placement courses was available in their home countries.

LML: My junior year, I started to focus on college. I buckled down, enrolled in AP Physics and World History and was on the honor roll and principal's list. I knew this would be important when I was applying for colleges.

The three international students explained that the secondary school systems in their countries were organized very differently from the United States. For example, in secondary school includes what is traditionally referred to as middle school and high school in the United States. The school system did not offer opportunities such as dual credit and advanced placement, however, upper-level students (high school seniors) were assigned to do career-based research projects whereby students were given opportunities to meet with professionals to explore their career interests and write about their findings. D.E. also detailed a similar experience while attending secondary school.

“Once we got closer to senior year, we were pretty much prepared for the real world. We had class projects that prepared us for what to expect in college. Professionals came into the classes to give us the real-world preparation, in terms what to expect.”

The expertise availed to the high school students was not limited to professionals who visited the high schools. College students were mentioned by the interviewees as valuable sources of information. Conversation topics ranged from how colleges and majors were selected to internship opportunities. In his own words, Jay retrieved important details about getting ready for college as follows:

“During my junior year my teacher had two student interns in her biology class, and she would let them lead some of the class discussion. Most of us would ask them questions about college and how they were able to get their internship at the high school. They were helpful to us because they told us things we wouldn't have known, like for instance, the difference between the quarter system and the semester system. The quarter system seemed to be way harder to me.”

Despite the differences in pre-college experiences among the men in the study, they all plainly concurred that the communications and interactions were directly raising their comfort level and knowledge about college.

High School Peer Influence

Influence from high school peers emerged as a theme. Several participants recounted personal conversations and experiences with high school peers about college, and how those conversations impacted their decision to enroll in college.

In some cases, peers can have more of an influence on a student's emotional, social, and intellectual development during pre-college and college years than a family. When asked to discuss their experiences while in high school, the participants covered a variety of factors. They remembered engaging in conversations about college with their high school peers, who demonstrated a personal commitment to enrolling in college. These interactions included discussions about college majors and campus life. Two of the men viewed the discussions they had with their high school peers as a way to motivate and encourage each other to pursue their college goals.

I.N.: When I was in high school, of course every child's dream after high school was to go to college. We all would ask each other, "What school are you going to?" That was actually a thing that we look out for in high school because we felt that just getting done with high school wouldn't be enough; you could get a job but it would be a demeaning job.

Smargarboi: When I was back home, I would tell my friends, tomorrow, I want to stand out there and be somebody, that's why I'm going to college in the States.

One participant reminisced about how growing up in a small town, with two universities located within five miles of his home provided him and his friends the opportunity to see and experience college life before they actually enrolled. Speaking about one of the colleges, he jokingly remembered how he and his friends talked about how much they looked forward to attending the university so they could hang out and watch the girls all day.

Jay: I remember visiting both campuses during my freshman year in high school and how the only thing me and my friends would talk about after that visit was

how we couldn't wait to move on campus and hang out in front of "The Caf", which was the cafeteria. Plus, we saw all of the girls hanging out there, so yeah, I knew then that I was going to somebody's college.

Participation in Extracurricular Activities

Some of the participants highlighted how their involvement in sports served as additional incentive for them to perform well academically. One participant emphasized how his involvement in extracurricular activities helped him develop the social skills necessary to be successful in college. Involvement in extracurricular activities such as band and sports was more common among the three U.S.-born participants than the international participants. It was important to note that while the three international participants did not indicate their involvement in extracurricular activities in high school, each of them was involved in soccer leagues outside of their secondary schools. These leagues were not organized sporting events affiliated with their respective school systems, but rather leisure activities played on weekends with family and friends.

Three of the students played football while in high school; however, only one of them attributed their academic success to their participation in sports.

D.K.: I played football my freshman year and I knew in order to continue to play I had to make good grades. I played linebacker then switched to quarterback during my sophomore year. My teammates looked up to me, even though I was only a sophomore at the time. I continued to play through senior year.

Another participant explained how he sought out extracurricular activities as a way to "kill time" after his mother dropped him off and before she picked him up from school. The student, whose mother was a single parent, found a way to immerse himself in the high school experience, and eventually engaged in a number of extracurricular activities.

LML: I started doing band because my mom had to drop me off at school at like six o'clock every morning. School didn't take in until 7 a.m. and band started at 6 a.m., so it worked out perfectly. I also played football my freshman year. I did athletic training my sophomore and junior year, and the first part of my senior year I played lacrosse. I couldn't pass up the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities because my mom's work schedule made it possible, plus I liked the idea of being able to hang out with my friends.

Each of the themes highlighted in the previous section represent the secondary school experiences that high-achieving African American/Black male students in this study attributed to their academic success.

Research Question 2: Personal Experiences Contributing to Academic Success

The participants offered up extensive information in response to the topic covered by research question number two. their personal experiences while in college and how things such as self-motivation, family interactions, adjustment to college, and engagement contributed to their academic success in college.

Self-Motivation

Short-term and long-term goals were important to these students and they had a clear sense of what they wanted to do with their lives. Each participant believed they had the ability to achieve their goals. They also attributed their success to personal characteristics, such as leadership, diligence and intelligence. Each of the men in the study displayed a high level of self-confidence, determination and motivation. Albert Bandura (2001) refers to this characteristic as self-efficacy, and posits: “People with a strong sense of efficacy have high assurance in their capabilities to approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided” (p. 202). Participants indicated that they were self-motivated to perform well academically and complete their college degrees.

LML: From the get-go, I knew I was going to college. After middle school, I knew that to achieve my end goal I needed to go to college to get a degree. I knew at that moment that going to college was going to be the best route for me.

Smargarboi: I set expectations for myself. I want to get my degree; further my education. My ultimate goal is to become a medical doctor. I want to get my bachelor’s degree in nursing, then master’s degree, and then pursue medical school.

While each of the participants talked about the financial benefit of obtaining a college degree, one of the men expressed how financial independence served as a motivator for him to establish financial security for his future family.

I.N.: Right now, my motivation is having financial freedom, to be able to stand on my own and make my own decisions financially. I dream of having my own family one day; I want to go beyond to provide for my family. You know what I mean? Build an empire for my children before they come into this world.

Personal accountability is another key attribute ascribed to self-motivation of the participants. Three of the young men in the study had previously attended four-year institutions and subsequently withdrew or dropped out due to a variety of personal circumstances. Yet, with self-motivation and the support of family members they endured and returned to college to accomplish their goal of obtaining a college degree.

Family Interactions

Family support and encouragement play a significant role in the lives of several student participants. Family support did not always come from parents but from parental figures, such as aunts, uncles and grandparents. Alternatively, in the case of two participants, challenging or tumultuous relationships with family members served as motivation for them to succeed in college. According to the participants, families served as motivation to enroll in college and achieve success. Four of the six men in the study acknowledged the significance of their parental figures' declarations about college, and how a positive family influence impacted their academic success. Regarding their intentions to attend college, two of the participants reflected on the sacrifices and commitments made by their families in support of their educational goals.

D.E.: My family wasn't wealthy, but they do understand the value of education. They would always encourage us to go higher than what they have achieved. They make sure we have the necessary resources available to go further in life. Having family who pushed us to aim higher to go to college was motivation for me to always do better because people believe in you and you don't want to disappoint them.

Smargarboi: When my mom retired, she had a gratuity payment of money from the government. When she received her payment, she said that she wanted to make sure I went to school overseas. She had a dream of buying a car for herself to drive my father around, but instead she paid for me to come to the U.S. Most people who get their payment want to buy houses, vacations, you know, use the money for themselves, but she wanted to do it for me. I shed tears because she sacrificed for me.

While the majority of the men in this study revealed how positive interactions with family members motivated them to succeed, two of the participants reported how negative experiences with family members served to inspire them to achieve success.

D.K.: I grew up in a two-parent household where my parents were present but absent, so-to-speak. My home environment was surrounded by drug and alcohol abuse and aggression on a daily basis.

I.N.: I didn't have anything from my parents. I was just thrown out into this world with no direction from them. They decided that rearing their children was too much of a struggle so they left us with other family members. I don't want to be like my parents, I want to leave a legacy for my children, and I see nursing as a stepping-stone towards the pursuit of a medical degree.

Family interactions went beyond each individual's family as participants also planned to provide similar interactions to others. For instance, two participants, both of whom were international students, expounded how they planned to "pay it forward" to provide support to younger members in their families who also wished to pursue college in the United States.

D.E.: There are so many things I want accomplish. I've started a few things on my own. I have worked with the HCC Foundation to start a book scholarship for students who want to come to HCC to study from Jamaica. I'm paying it forward as a way to show my appreciation to my family for their generosity and support for me while I'm in school.

I.N.: Right now I sponsor my other siblings in school. With the little I have, I send to them and to my mom. My mom is not as strong as she used to be, so I try my best to look out for them.

In addition, the two men who were single parents explained how their own children served as their motivators to achieve academic success. They believed their children would be more likely to enroll in college if they had parents who were college educated.

D.K.: My daughter is my main motivation right now. From the moment she was born I knew I had to give up my street life. I wanted her to have better opportunities than I had growing up.

Jay Wallace: I enrolled in college because I want to live a better life for me and my daughter. I don't want to live paycheck-to-paycheck.

The reflections of the participants indicated that family interactions and support, both positive and negative positively impacted their academic journey. The next theme details how these young men were able to successfully navigate through the college environment and adjust to life as college students.

Adjustment to College Life

Several of the students discussed how the helpful campus climate made their adjustment to college much easier. All participants described having had a positive experience navigating the college environment, and reported increased levels of confidence after their first semester. Nearly all of them explained how they felt less intimidated when engaging with their professors and peers. They also viewed their involvement in student organizations as instrumental to their adjustment. Adjustment to college life is challenging, regardless if it is a four-year or two-year institution. The participants in this study affirmed that their adjustment to college was progressive in nature as they became more familiar with the expectations of college and the campus climate. Several of them elaborated about how they felt more confident talking to faculty after their first semester. Each of the men in this study expounded how they were more likely to engage in discussions with peers, and participate in campus activities, once they felt a sense of belonging to the institution.

I.N.: I remember how shy I was during my first semester. I couldn't stand to be around groups of people, plus I had a professor who had a hard time pronouncing my name. I also had a difficult time understanding my professor because English is not my first language. I was [a] little bit uncomfortable at first but overall my first semester was good. I had a 4.0 GPA. By my second semester, I was much more confident. I knew I wanted the full experience of college. I didn't just want to go to class and then go home. So I began to sit in the front in each of my classes so I could ask my professors questions if I did not understand. I also got involved in extracurricular activities on campus.

Participants also explained that having a welcoming campus environment and a diverse student body contributed to their academic success, and made it easier to form new friends and establish support systems.

Smargarboi: HCC has a good infrastructure; you have everything you need here. If a student is failing, or says 'It's not good', they are only making excuses. I would say that the college environment here is conducive for learning.

Jay Wallace: One of the strengths of the college is its diversity. You walk onto any of the campuses and you can see people from all walks of life. No one is considered a minority at this institution; no one is treated like a minority.

Participants noted how having access to resources, such as study space, student lounges, and food services, also made the environment more welcoming and friendly, and increased the probability of them hanging around campus longer.

Engagement

Engagement emerged as a major theme. Each of the participants describe various ways in which they have been involved while in college, and how their involvement contributed to their academic success. Several of the students discussed how their engagement with faculty and their peers outside of the classroom motivated, encouraged and supported them in their educational journeys.

As participants described their experiences with faculty and staff, it was evident that the students valued relationships and faculty support beyond their classroom interactions.

I.N.: This past semester, I had a really good relationship with my teacher. She is someone that you can talk to and who will encourage you, even when you're not doing well in class. She is by far, the coolest faculty member I have met.

D.E.: I think the professors have the best interest of students at heart. I remember during my first semester I had a great instructor. She went the extra mile to make sure everyone had the resources they needed to do the work. Even now, when she sees me, she introduces me as one of her best students. I always appreciate her for all she's done as an instructor.

According to participants, peer relationships and networking opportunities helped African American and Black male students feel more engaged and comfortable about spending time on campus. A couple of participants, who had friends on campus, explained how their friendships served as an extension of a larger system of support for their academic journey. Another form of engagement that was commonly expressed by the participants was engagement in student organizations and campus activities:

I.N.: I think I have been blessed to have so many people that I call my brothers around me. Some of them are from Africa, some are from other countries, and some Americans. I try to advise them to learn from others and get involved on campus. Going to college is not where you get all you want or need in life, you get most of it from the people you know, meet and hang out with.

Jay Wallace: HCC has a wide variety of students ranging in different ages, gender, cultures and ethnicities. I've made a lot of friends, some who look like me, some who don't, but what I like is how the students tend to "push" each other to another level. That's how I got involved with SGA, because two of my peers encouraged me to get more involved in campus organizations.

One participant explained how his ability to understand social context for engaging in conversations with peers made it easier for him to communicate with them outside of class:

D.K.: I try to engage with other students, specifically African American males, because I feel like my past life experiences allow me to switch between social climates. So, for instance, when I hang around the "weed smokers", I try to talk to them about SGA and things like that, but I know that when they're in a group they are less likely to be open to doing anything other than what the rest of the group prefers.

Each of the participants shared how study groups served as an opportunity for them to engage with their peers outside of class. Some of the young men recounted how they joined or formed study groups to build their networks outside of class.

Smargarboi: I participate, and sometimes lead study groups. They have been very instrumental and useful to me. Being a nursing student, I find study groups very helpful. I usually try to go a couple of hours per week.

D.E: I participate in study groups and meet my peers at the library. Sometimes we communicate over the phone or meet up at Starbucks. We established friendships outside the classroom, and which makes it easier for all of us to support each other.

LML: I'm usually the one that organizes study groups. Last semester it was twice per week for my government class. This semester, I've started another one where we meet for about an hour and a half. It's my small attempt to try to get more people to come to this campus. There's usually between 5-7 people who attend every week.

The participants in this study highlighted the various ways that high-achieving African American and Black male students engage with faculty, staff, and their peers during their

academic journey. The interactions and experiences detailed in this section were identified as personal experiences that positively contributed to the academic success of the men in this study.

Research Question 3: Institutional Programs Contributing to Academic Success

Most of the participants took advantage of the services and resources offered, while others admittedly did not. All of the participants, however, were aware of the services and resources provided by the college. The institutional programs and services discussed in this section reflected what the participants perceived as positive institutional factors contributing to their academic success in the community college. These included student organizations, leadership development and academic support services.

Student Organizations

All of the participants were aware of the opportunities available for them to participate in extracurricular activities, even though some did not. The students who were involved discussed how their participation in student organizations and campus activities helped enhance their overall college experience and academic success at HCC. These students were involved in a wide range of organizations, from National Honor Society to Student Government.

I.N.: I think one of my most positive aspects about college is being able to serve in student government and being able to run for office. That was a big one for me. Running for office was a huge platform; people saw me on social media and would come up to me like, 'Hey, I saw you on the internet.'

D.K.: I believe student government is a good resource for students. Being involved in student organizations will definitely help students get acclimated to college because you're around other students who are assertive and have a strong belief system; they are serious. You will pick up certain tendencies from them that you can apply to certain situations. I was also selected to be a peer mentor in the Minority Male Initiative program.

Smargarboi: I am a member of PTK and the National Society of Collegiate Scholars. It is fun because I get to meet other people. I was also invited to participate in other student organizations, but I chose not to. When you are involved in organizations, you hear about others' experiences. I even had the opportunity to meet the former mayor of Houston.

The participants took great pride in their leadership roles in the student organizations and recognized the significant level of influence and support they received from their peers as a result of their involvement in these organizations.

Leadership Development Programs

Participants reflected on their involvement in institutional programs that provided them opportunities to develop their leadership skills, and the value the programs had on their overall educational experience at HCC. When asked to discuss their experiences with the HCC programs, participants detailed various types of campus resources they regularly accessed and how the programs contributed to their academic success. In addition to student organizations, participants consistently referenced two programs within the institution, Peer Mentoring and the Minority Male Initiative program.

The Peer Mentoring program was a leadership and networking program for students. The primary goal of the program was to provide motivation, cultural enrichment, and academic and personal support for students. Each of the six participants expressed knowledge of the college's peer mentoring program, but only two students shared how the peer mentoring program provided additional guidance and support they needed to achieve their goals. They talked about relationships they developed with their peers as a result of their participation in the program.

LML: The Society of Eagle Mentors is pretty cool. During my first semester, I decided to get involved because I felt like I could help out. I'm still friends with several people who were involved in the program.

I.N.: I'm involved in the peer- mentoring program and I try to work closely with other international students. I advise them to "spread out" and try to learn from others and mix up with other races and learn from them.

The Minority Male Initiative (MMI) program provided academic support, social engagement, and leadership development opportunities for males of color. Participants described the significance of the program for African American male students.

D.K.: I was selected to be a student mentor for the Minority Male Initiative program. I really wanted to be a mentor because I felt like my story was one that

the participants could relate to. Even though I have a felony conviction. I wanted them to see me as an example of how college can change your life for the better.

Jay Wallace: I was recruited to participate in the Minority Male Initiative's Men of Honor student organization. I definitely think the program helps support African American and Hispanic male students but I decided not to participate, not because I don't think it is a good organization but I was in my last semester and I was focused on graduating.

While only a few of the participants actually participated in student organizations and the leadership development programs available at the college, each of the men in this study recognized the value of participating in student organizations and leadership development programs in their academic success.

Academic Support Services

Institutional resources, such as tutoring, writing labs, libraries, and career placement, are just a few examples of the types of academic support services that were available to all students. While not all of the participants took advantage of the available resources, most did avail themselves, and found the support to be vital in helping them achieve their academic goals. As noted by the students in this study, the use of institutional academic support services, such as tutoring, libraries, writing labs, advising, and career services, positively contributed to their academic success.

While each of the participants were aware of the tutoring services available at the college, only two of the participants regularly accessed them. Several of the students specified how they used the tutoring service at least once during their educational career at HCC.

D.K.: I definitely take advantage of tutoring for my math class. I knew that was my weakest subject, so I made sure I got the help I needed.

Smargarboi: Now that I am in the nursing program, I have a tutor. I meet with him twice per week. I also go to the library often to study.

Library services were available to all students and provided students with access to the technological, academic and physical resources to support their success. Several of the students explained that their use of the library was much more frequent during mid-terms and finals when

a quiet study space was needed. One student expressed his displeasure with the limited access to the library and study space at the location he attended. He stated “There is no on-campus library at Coleman. This is a problem because we spend a lot of our time on that campus. We don’t have much of a student commons or library space to study like at the other colleges.” Two of the participants explained how they accessed libraries for academic and personal enrichment.

LML: The library is really nice but the experience wasn’t that great. I use it because it’s the best library close to me. I think the library at Codwell Campus is the best library in the entire college. I’m an avid reader and I like Greek novels, and they have a really good collection.”

D.K.: I used the library at West Loop quite a bit when I first started because I didn’t have a computer at home. I don’t use it as much now that I have my own computer, but occasionally our study groups will use the meeting rooms.

Writing labs provided students with supplemental writing support services. Several participants shared they had accessed the writing labs at least once for assistance. The three international student participants indicated more frequent use of the writing lab. One of them explained why it was helpful to him.

Smargarboi: When I first started, I relied on the writing lab quite a bit. My English wasn’t the best and it was affecting my ability to perform well in my English I and English II classes. I knew I needed help so I took advantage of the service. It didn’t make me feel like I wasn’t smart, I just needed the extra help.”

The Career Services department provided students with information about different occupations, provided job placement and internship assistance, conducted career assessments to determine student strengths and success predictors, and also conducted mock interviews and assisted students with resume writing and portfolios. Study participants were aware of the assistance available in Career Services; however, only two students actually sought the services. Both students were entering their final semester at HCC and felt it was important to seek assistance in the Career Services office to help prepare them for career and internship opportunities.

D.E.: I go to the Career Services department quite a bit now that I am in my final semester. They helped me by recording a mock interview. I didn’t realize the

types of mistakes I made until I had a chance to review the video. It was very, very helpful.

LML: The Career Services department helped me find an internship with NASA. I had been discussing my career interests with the staff member and she identified the opportunity and helped me create my portfolio for my application packet.

The Academic Advising department assists students with developing plans to achieve their educational and professional goals. The research students explain how advisors helped them with the initial selection of their major and classes, and provided other helpful information such as registration deadlines, international student services policies and procedures, as well as transfer credit information.

Smargarboi: I usually meet with my advisor when I have problems. I mostly talk to the advisor in the International Student Services Office. He is always willing to help. I even send other students to him for help. I think it's easier talking with him because he gives good insight to me as an international student.

Jay Wallace: I didn't have to meet with my advisor much since I had transferred a lot of credits from my previous institution. I think I met with her once; she was helpful though. She helped make sure I was on track to graduate, and she knew I had plans to transfer to another four-year institution so she made sure that all of my HCC courses would transfer.

Support services provide students the supplemental support necessary for them to be successful and it is clearly evident that the young men in this study found these services to be a benefit to their academic success.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presents background information about the study participants and their responses related to the three research questions. Excerpts from individual interviews are presented in this chapter to give voice to the participants. Findings indicate that high-achieving African American male students credit a number of secondary experiences, personal experiences, and institutional programs and services for their academic success. Although all of the participants excelled academically, many of them had to overcome emotional, psychosocial, and physical challenges; however, their self-motivation compelled them to succeed. Ten themes evolved from this study: preparation for college while in high school, high school peer influence,

participation in extracurricular activities, self-motivation, family interactions, adjustment to college, engagement, participation in student organizations, involvement in leadership development programs and accessing academic support services.

Chapter Five analyzes the findings, includes recommendations for the study site, discusses implications of the findings, suggests topics for future research, and reflects participant recommendations for African American male students in community colleges.

Chapter Five: Summary of Findings & Implications

Chapter Four contained an overview of the findings, giving a voice to the African American/ Black male students and their perceptions of the experiences that promoted their success in a large urban community college. This chapter provides an overview of the purpose of the study, analyzes and answers the research questions, makes recommendations based on the findings and offers insight to practitioners into the findings. I conclude with ideas for future research.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of six high-achieving African American/Black male community college students and their perceptions of how those experiences positively impacted their academic performance.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The three research questions guiding this study were as follows:

1. What secondary school experiences do high-achieving African American male students perceive as contributing to their academic success?
2. What personal experiences do high-achieving African American male students perceive as contributing to their academic success in community college?
3. What institutional programs and services do high-achieving African American male students perceive as contributing to their academic success in community college?

METHODOLOGY

This case study included qualitative research methods used to illuminate the experiences and perceptions of the participants (Hycner, 1985). The site selected for the study was Houston Community College, a large urban community college located in Houston, Texas. Six African American/Black male students with minimum grade point averages of 3.5 or higher were

selected as participants. Over two months, semi-structured interviews were conducted with the student participants. Member checks and document reviews were used to determine credibility and validity to enhance study findings. Data were collected from two in-depth individual interviews with each participant. Lofland, Snow, and Lofland (2006) suggest:

The most fundamental aspect of a person's social setting is that of meaning. These are the dialectical categories that make up a participant's view of reality and with which an action is defined, and is referred to by social analysts as cultural norms. (p. 107)

The responses included in this section were chosen and arranged for clarity and effect in an effort to highlight the similarities or differences among the participants.

Interviews lasted for approximately 90 minutes and were digitally recorded and transcribed. During the first interview, participants completed the necessary consent forms and responded to the interview questions. Follow-up interviews were scheduled one week later to allow participants to reflect on their initial responses, give them the opportunity to review first interview transcripts, and provide additional comments or address unanswered questions.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Theoretical Relationships to Findings

The findings from this study details the perspectives of the high-achieving African American/Black males in community college. Bandura's Social Learning Theory and Self Efficacy and Tinto's Student Integration Theory were the theoretical models that guided this study. Bandura's Social Learning Theory proposes that learning occurs by observing the behaviors, attitudes and outcomes of others. Several participants shared stories of how they viewed the success of close family and friends as positive influences on their decisions to enroll in college and excel academically. Peer influence and engagement with peers outside of class was instrumental in the decision making of the participants, particularly decisions related to college enrollment. Reflecting on how the findings fit into the theories, it was concluded that the theories were predictive of many of the findings in the study.

Social Learning Theory includes four principles, (1) ability to pay attention to details, (2) student retention depends on context, (3) reproduction of student success occurs on demand, and (4) student motivation can be intrinsic or extrinsic. For the purpose of this study, the fourth principle, student self-motivation, was most prevalent among the participants.

A second approach to this framework is that motivation and self-efficacy are concepts rooted in social learning theory and were common attributes among the participants. Each of the participants discussed how family and financial freedom served as motivation for them to achieve academic success in college. Each of the men possessed a strong sense of belief in their ability to accomplish their goals.

The theoretical models that guided this study were used to help me better understand the significance of the data collected. Tinto's theory helped explained the role of student engagement in increased persistence of African American/Black males in this study. Each of the participants highlighted the value of engaging in academic programs, student organizations and engagement with faculty and peers while in college. Given the data, I found Tinto's theory helpful to conclude that student engagement was a strong predictor of student success.

Finally, this study supports Wood's (2010) conceptual model of African American male academic success in community college in that each of the participants in this study underlined institutional factors such as faculty engagement, peer engagement, student activities and campus climate as factors that directly contributed to their academic success. Motivation and self-efficacy were the psychological factors found in this study as contributors to the success of the participants in this study. The men also noted how study groups and academic support services such as advising aided in their academic success in community college. Lastly, personal factors such as family support, peer support, and financial motivation were attributed to the academic success of the participants in this study.

The narratives of the African American/Black male students in this study represented the experiences they viewed as instrumental in leading to their academic success. As reported in

Chapter Four of this study, ten themes emerged. In this chapter, I will answer each research question examining each theme in the findings in light of the theoretical models I chose to apply. For the first research question I will expound on three themes that emerged from the secondary school experiences that positively contributed to the academic success of the participants. These include preparation for college while in high school, high school peer influence, and participation in extracurricular activities.

For the second research question, I will illustrate the four themes that emerged from the personal experiences that positively contributed to the academic success of the participants. The four themes that emerged are self-motivation, family interactions, adjustment to college and engagement. For the third research question, I will explain the institutional programs and services that high-achieving African American/Black males attributed to their academic success. Three themes emerged from the third question, participation in student organizations, leadership development programs and academic support services. The following illustrates the significant findings with connections to the literature.

Preparation for College While in High School

Concerning Research Question One, I observed that the findings suggested that the high-achieving African American/Black male students attributed their academic success to specific secondary school experiences. For instance, it appeared that personal preparation to attend college was instrumental as they focused on their future career goals. In addition to rigorous coursework, such as Advanced Placement (AP) classes and career-focused projects, students who attended high schools with an embedded college-going culture, were better prepared for the expectations and demands of college. As Conley (2007) reported, students who possessed the requisite skills, knowledge, and understanding are successful in college-level courses. Prior research showed both educational goals (Bush & Bush, 2010; Perrakis, 2008) and high school performance measures (Perrakis, 2008) to be strong predictors of success.

High School Peer Influence

The findings reveal that the high-achieving African American/Black male students often engaged in conversations about their college aspirations with their high school peers. Conversations extended beyond “what they wanted to be when they grew up”. Instead, the findings affirmed that the high-achieving African American/Black male students viewed college as an attainable goal and were more likely to have taken advantage of opportunities to visit college campuses and have reflected on their experiences with peers. This finding is aligned with the literature and predictably led that academic and social support received by peers leads to increased confidence in the high-achieving students’ abilities (Bonner, 2001).

Participation in Extracurricular Activities

The theme of engagement in extracurricular activities also answered Research Question One because the participation provided opportunities for high-achieving African American/Black male students to build peer relationships outside of class and exemplify leadership skills. Participation in high school extracurricular activities, such as band and sports, served as incentives for high-achieving African American/Black male students to perform well academically, and promoted a strong sense of self-worth. This was congruent with Hebert’s (1998) theory that participation in extracurricular activities helped create a sense of connectedness for high-achieving African American male students through discipline, group achievement, and mutual expectations of high performance.

Self-Motivation

I was able to find an answer to Research Question Two because the findings clearly conveyed that self-motivation positively contributed to the academic success of the participants. The inherent value that high-achieving African American/Black male students placed on their ability to achieve success bore an evident relationship to their awareness and understanding necessary to clearly articulate their goals and identify the paths they chose take to accomplish those goals. This reinforced Wilkins’ (2005) position that academically successful Black males’

levels of self-efficacy can be ascertained by several indices: first, by their early recognition of a college degree as an attainable goal; second, by their positive academic self-perception; and third, by how they negotiate challenges and obstacles related to their education.

Family Interactions

The theme of Family Interactions helped answer Research Question Two because familial expectations, involvement, and support proved to be contributing factors to high-achieving African American/Black male student success, and because family members provided encouragement, served as examples of success, and reinforced the importance of education and academic excellence. Family influences were diverse and, in some cases, familial support for the six participants came from extended family members, such as aunts and uncles. Positive motivating factors identified were, achieving financial stability to provide for one's family, and serving as an example for younger siblings, and making family members proud.

Negative family interactions also served as motivating factors for high-achieving African American/Black male students. Overcoming dysfunctional family challenges by achieving success allowed these men to change the trajectory for their families and their future. This finding reinforced what others report. Lester (2004) posited that academically successful African American males whose families were more involved in their education tended to achieve and sustain higher levels of success over time. Fordham (1996), illustrated the impact of family involvement when an aunt and uncle, of an African American male student, provided discipline, structure, and high expectations for his future. Subsequently, the student was able to achieve top grades in his high school and received the highest overall score in his class on the PSAT. Consequently, family interactions and influences were invariably attributed to the success of the young men in this study.

Adjustment to College

The theme of Adjustment to College also served to answer Research Question Two because, according to the findings, the first semester college experience was a time for students

to adjust to the expectations of being in college. The findings from this study demonstrated how high-achieving African American/Black male students tended to become more familiar with the college environment after their first semester. While they entered college with high grade point averages, they also had higher levels of anxiety during their first semester. Thus, a welcoming campus climate, plus a diverse student, faculty and staff population, made it easier for students to adjust over time. This echoed Tinto's (1975, 1987, 1993) work, which suggested that the more students are integrated into the academic and social aspects of the institution the more likely they are to persist. Additionally, other researchers, such as Pascarella, 1980; Upcraft & Gardner 1989; Davis, 1994; Wyatt, 2011), found that relationships between student and faculty were important to persistence. "The freshman's most critical transition period occurs during the first two to six weeks," and "the quality and responsiveness of faculty and staff may be the most powerful resources available for improving student success and persistence" (Upcraft & Gardner, 1989, p. 66).

In this study, during their second semester, and subsequent semesters, the African American/Black male participants uniformly reported they developed a sense of belonging and a higher comfort level when engaging in discussions with their peers and faculty members. The international Black male students also found it easier to ask instructors for assistance and clarification, if needed, and they sought opportunities to become more involved in campus activities and organizations. However, these findings concerning international students were inconsistent with Berger and Milem's (1998) work, which postulated that students who did not get involved early in the fall semester are more likely to stay uninvolved for the entire year, and "they were less likely to perceive the institution or their peers as supportive, less likely to become integrated, and as a result less likely to persist" (p. 658).

Engagement

The findings in the seventh theme offered up answers to Research Question Two because they demonstrated that student engagement is essential to academic success.

Specifically, these findings showed that faculty members who regularly discussed career goals and provided support were key to academic success. Participants expressed appreciation for faculty members who pushed them to work harder and do better. This concept was supported by Evans (2010), who posited that faculty members who were passionate and engaging could have a tremendous impact on students' experiences in the class and their overall success within the institution.

Several researchers (Goins 1995; Kuh, 2009; Ullah & Wilson, 2007) supported the assumption that engagement was fundamental for student success, and suggested that peer group support decreased students' feelings of alienation, helplessness, marginalization, and meaninglessness; instead, it led to greater social integration. Peer relationships were also important and could help high-achieving African American male students establish networks to provide academic support to other students. For instance, participants described how they formed or joined study groups as a way to build relationships with their peers outside of class.

Participation in Student Organizations

The findings in the eight theme related to participation in student organizations aided in answering Research Question Three. Baker (2008) posited extracurricular involvement within the college environment had a positive relationship to academic performance of under-represented college students. Involvement in student organizations was another way that high-achieving African American male students can be engaged in college. Most of the participants were involved in Student Government and at least one additional student organization on campus. They viewed their participation in student organizations as a factor that contributes to their academic success.

Leadership Development Programs

The findings in the ninth theme related to leadership development programs and other institutional programs answered Research Question Three because programs that provided opportunities to cultivate leadership skills enhanced the academic success of high-achieving

African American/Black male students. Participants explained how programs like the Minority Male Initiative and Peer Mentoring provided them opportunities for social engagement, cultural enrichment, and leadership development. The literature affirmed that a nurturing environment for African American/Black male students had a positive impact on their retention and graduation rates (Journal of Blacks in Higher Education, 2007, p. 60).

Academic Support Services

Finally, the findings in the tenth theme related to academic support services answered Research Question Three to the text the findings explained that academic support services, such as tutoring, libraries, writing labs, career services and advising services, provided individual attention and improved the likelihood of academic success of high-achieving African American/Black male students. This reflected the literature that indicated usage of academic support services was integral to positive student outcomes (Baker, 1996; Beckles, 2008; Freeman, 2003; Pope, 2006).

This section described the findings of this study in relation to the research questions. Next I will turn to the information I drew from this study to offer implications for practice.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

This study explored the lived experiences of six academically high-achieving African American/ Black male students enrolled at Houston Community College, a two-year institution located in a large, urban city. Although this study may not be generalized, implications from this research may be useful for secondary and postsecondary educators when assessing the impact of institutional initiatives, programs, and services that support academic success among high-achieving African American males. Perhaps, more importantly, the research findings can inform parents and family members of how emotional, social, and financial motives influenced high-achieving African American males' aspirations for success.

Secondary School Experiences

As participants discussed their preparation for college while in high school, they acknowledged the importance of having an awareness and understanding of the expectations of college in order to achieve their educational goals. However, not all took advantage of the college preparatory programs and services available through their high schools. Involvement in pre-college programs and activities, such as advanced placement courses, dual credit, early college high schools, college career days, and extracurricular activities, helped to equip the high-achieving African American male students with the social capital they needed to succeed in college.

Tresaugue (2008) reported that many of the students graduating from Texas high schools were not adequately prepared for college. Findings from this study support placing greater emphasis on the value of dual credit and advanced placement courses. High school guidance counselors and teachers should be intentional about engaging high-achieving African American male students in college preparatory programs. High schools should identify ways in which they can facilitate and encourage peer-to-peer discussions about college and career choices. School administrators should provide parents and family members with information explaining the advantages of having their children participate in college preparatory programs. This could include step-by-step details of the participating requirements, program costs, and financial resources available. Public school policymakers and regulatory agencies should expand college readiness measures beyond assessment of subject matter to include assessment of soft skills necessary for college.

The traditional roles of teachers and coaches responsible for extracurricular activities and athletic programs may need to transcend beyond that of providing program oversight to become

case managers responsible for reinforcing the notion of academic success and college preparedness for students.

Personal Experiences

Participants in the study had high levels of self-motivation and self-efficacy, which suggested they want to be successful and believed they have the ability to achieve their goals. Community colleges may focus on teaching strategies to help faculty understand the constructs of self-motivation, outcome expectancies, and social development of high-achieving African American and Black male students.

This study also highlighted the importance of family and its contribution to high-achieving African American and Black male academic success. Community colleges may need to find ways to engage family members in the learning process of African American and Black male students. This could involve inviting them to attend special events or engaging them in activities that allow them to share personal and cultural experiences.

The literature contended that family support was an important factor in college success (Bean, 2005; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Deli-Amen & Rosenbaum, 2003). Institutions should provide information to family members explaining the importance of the role they play in supporting academic success of African American male students while in college. This information could be embedded in new student orientation or distributed to parents during campus visits, parent nights, and other information sessions.

Community colleges served as pivotal entry points to higher education for African American males and other at-risk students. Creating a welcoming environment for students is essential to enhancing the student experience in college. Student organization involvement, engagement with faculty and peers, and campus climate are instrumental in helping high-achieving African American male students adjust to college life. The literature on developing learning environments to support academic success of at-risk populations affirmed that the

probability of success among students of color was increased when the learning environment was collaborative and supportive (Colbeck, Cabrera & Terenzini, 2000; Sanchez, 2000).

Administrators must assess the climate on their campuses to determine if the culture is aligned with its mission of supporting student success. It will be important to emphasize the expectation of maintaining academic rigor and student accountability and responsibility. Faculty can encourage students to develop relationships with peers who have similar academic and career goals. This would reinforce what others reported (Hall & Rowan, 2000; Harris, 1999; Hughes, 2002) as contributing to the success of high-achieving African American males in community colleges.

Institutional Programs & Services

Involvement in leadership development programs like Minority Male Initiatives and Peer Mentoring programs provided high-achieving African American male students opportunities to develop the leadership and soft skills needed to be successful. The study findings confirmed that high-achieving African American male students wanted to be engaged in opportunities to connect and collaborate with administrators on developing programs that enhanced the student experience in college. This was congruent with Harper's (2012) research, which presented institutions of higher education with a framework of eight standards designed for improving the collegiate experience of African American male students:

Best is when Black male undergraduates are engaged as equally powerful collaborators with administrators and the expertise these men possess regarding their individual and collective experiences on campus is highly valued (p. 26).

The men in this study were able to successfully navigate through their transition to postsecondary education; however, some mentioned that having transition programs, like summer bridge programs, would have minimized their level of anxiety during their first semester in college. College administrators should identify ways to include high-achieving African American male students in academic and affinity group programs. This recommendation was

consistent with standard number six of Harper's (2012) eight standards for establishing Black male initiatives.

There are black men who earn good grades [and] are actively engaged inside and outside the classroom. . . Institutional stakeholders should better understand the conditions and institutional factors that enable current achievers to thrive (p. 26).

This could include the establishment of a Student Ambassador program that would involve students in outreach and recruitment initiatives. Students should also be encouraged to take advantage of academic resources on campus. Efforts should be made to inform students and their families about the availability of tutoring, libraries, writing labs, and student support services.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This case study was conducted at a single, large urban community college with a small sample size. Participants were purposefully selected based on gender, race, and academic performance. This study did not compare the attitudes and experiences of high-achieving African American males to Black males from different cultural backgrounds enrolled in private and four-year institutions. This study did not suggest that findings can be generalized to other populations. Given the substantial gap in the literature, the implications for additional research on high-achieving African American or Black male student success are significant.

Given the scope of this study, it is possible that other researchers may offer different insights into the perceptions of factors contributing to the academic success of high-achieving African American male students. First, replication of this study in a rural community college setting using a larger sample size to compare and contrast the perceived factors that contribute to African American male student success may yield different results. Second, ethnographic research is necessary to compare how differing cultural backgrounds may influence academic success of high-achieving Black males born in the United States and high-achieving Black males born outside of the United States. Lastly, additional inquiry is needed to determine if socio-

economic status of high-achieving African American males is correlated to self-efficacy and student success among students enrolled in private two-year institutions.

CONCLUSION

This research study attempted to present factors that high-achieving African American male students perceived as positively contributing to their academic success in community college. The stories shared by the participants may provide guidance for secondary and postsecondary school administrators when developing institutional programs, policies, and practices that address the needs of this student population. Moreover, this research adds to the limited body of knowledge about high-achieving African American male success in community college.

Appendices

APPENDIX A: SAMPLE LETTER OF INVITATION

Dear Sir,

You are invited to participate in a research study entitled *Perceived Experiences that Positively Contribute to African American Male Student Success at a Large Urban Community College*. The study will be conducted by Shantay Grays, a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin. You have been invited to participate based on the criteria of being an African American male student who has maintained a cumulative GPA of 3.5 or higher and has completed at least 30-semester credit hours of coursework in your program of study.

If selected, participation will entail individual, audio-recorded interviews and completion of a personal profile form. Participant responses will be anonymous and the information will be used as aggregated data. Individual participants will not be identified in any way. The total amount of time required for this study is approximately three (3) hours over the course of two days.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to participate, you may stop the interview at any time without any consequence to you. Your decision to participate will not impact your relationship with The University of Texas at Austin or Houston Community College.

Sincerely,

Shantay R. Grays

E-mail: sg_829@yahoo.com

Phone: 832-277-4769

APPENDIX B: PARTICIPANT RESPONSE FORM

Name: _____

(Please do not use your real name, please use a pseudonym as your identifier)

Email Address: _____

How would you prefer to be contacted? (Circle all that apply)

Email Phone (If phone, which number?)

Age: _____ Major: _____

Enrolled:

_____ Part-time (6 hours or less per semester)

_____ Full-time (12 hours or more per semester)

Where did you graduate from high school? City: _____ State: _____

Do you live with your parents? (circle one) Yes / No

Do you have siblings that attended college? (circle one) Yes / No

Do you work? (circle one) Yes / No If yes, how many hours per week do you work?

Are you involved in any extracurricular activities (i.e. Clubs, organizations, sports, church, volunteer, etc.)? (Circle one) Yes / No

Which days of the week are you available to participate (check all that apply)?

Please indicate the hours of the day in which you are available to participate.

_____ Monday:	What hours are you available?	_____
_____ Tuesday:	What hours are you available?	_____
_____ Wednesday:	What hours are you available?	_____
_____ Thursday:	What hours are you available?	_____
_____ Friday:	What hours are you available?	_____
_____ Saturday:	What hours are you available?	_____
_____ Sunday:	What hours are you available?	_____

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Title: Perceived Experiences that Positively Contribute to High-Achieving African American Male Student Success at a Large Urban Community College

Principal Investigator: Shantay R. Grays
Doctoral Candidate
Community College Leadership Program
The University of Texas at Austin

Dissertation Committee Chair: Dr. Norma Cantu, Professor
The University of Texas at Austin
Department of Educational Administration,
College of Education

This study is supported by The University of Texas at Austin and Houston Community College System, and is designed to research factors that may positively affect persistence and success among high-achieving African American male students enrolled in 2-year colleges.

This form provides you with information about the study. The principal investigator, Shantay R. Grays, will answer any questions you have about the research. Please read the information below and ask any questions you may have before deciding whether or not to participate. If you decide to be involved in this study, this form will be used to record your consent. Your participation is entirely voluntary. In addition, you may stop your participation at any time by informing the researcher.

Purpose:

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences and various factors that may have contributed to the academic success of African American male student participants. The questions that will be asked during the individual interviews are designed to allow the student participants to discuss what programs, services, people or other factors they perceive as contributing to their academic success.

Terms and Conditions:

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete a personal background/demographic form and a consent form, and participate in [two 60-minute] semi-structured interview sessions facilitated by the principal investigator.

Time Commitment:

If you are selected to participate, you will meet with the researcher at a scheduled time in a designated location on campus for your individual interviews. You will be asked a series of questions regarding your community college and high school experiences, family and community support system. You will only be asked to respond to questions in which you are comfortable responding within the 60-minute interview timeframe that will be facilitated by the principal investigator.

Risks and Benefits:

There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this study. Potential benefits of the study are to identify academic and non-academic experiences, which influence African American male persistence at community colleges.

Confidentiality:

Interviews will be recorded for the purpose of transcription only. Each participant will be assigned a number that corresponds to a pseudonym. Any information obtained in this study that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Upon conclusion of this study, all audiotapes will be destroyed. You will have the right to review/edit your interview transcript upon request. All data and audiotapes will be stored and locked in the office of the principal investigator, Shantay Grays. All data stored on a computer will be secured by a password. This data will also be coded to protect your identity. No personal identifying information will be discussed during the presentation of this study.

Compensation:

You will receive a \$10 gift certificate for your willingness to participate, should you agree. The gift certificate will be provided upon completion of your participation in the interviews.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and have sufficient information to make a decision about participating in this study. I agree to be audiotaped and I consent to participating in the study.

Print Name: _____

Signature of Participant: _____ **Date:** _____

Signature of Investigator: _____ **Date:** _____

Please bring a copy of this signed form with you. I will also have copies available when we meet.

APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL FOR STUDENTS

Interview Sessions (2 or more):

Part A. Secondary School Experiences

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your K-12 school experience.
3. Describe the characteristics of a good student. Do you believe you meet those characteristics? Why or why not?
4. Why did you go to college?
5. How did you choose your college major?
6. How much did you know about college before enrolling in HCC?

Probes: Describe how your pre-college knowledge impacted your college experience?

7. How would you describe your college experiences in terms of being academically prepared?

Probes: In what ways were you prepared? In what ways were you not prepared?

8. Did you overcome any challenges in this area, if so how?
9. Tell me about your experience as an African American male student in college.

Probes: What were your initial impressions? What was your first semester like? What about your second semester?

Part B: Personal Experiences

1. What contributed to your decision to pursue and complete your degree program?

Probes: What allowed you to continue? What influenced you to continue? What motivated you to continue?

2. How would you describe your financial situation while enrolled?

- Probes:** Did you work? Did you receive financial aid? If so, what type of financial aid did you receive? If you didn't apply for financial aid, why not?
3. How did your parents provide financial support for your education?
 4. Describe your experiences and interactions with other African American male students on the HCC campus.
 5. How do you think race plays into your experience as a student?
 6. Have you ever been discriminated against on the HCC campus because of your race?
 7. If so, describe your experience(s) and how you dealt with them. What expectations do you have for yourself?

Probes: What motivates you?

8. What are some of the greatest challenges you have observed from others during their college experience?

Part C: Experiences with Institutional Programs/Services

1. How did you make your choice to attend this college?
2. Do you attend study groups outside of your classes? How often? Why/why not?
3. How often do you meet with an advisor/counselor about your career goals?
4. How often do you talk with faculty about your academic or future career plans?
5. What were the most positive aspects of your college experience?
6. What were the most challenging aspects of your college experience?

Probes: Did you overcome these challenges? If so, how did you overcome these challenges?

7. Did you participate in any extracurricular activities, such as student organizations, recreational sports, or Student Government?

Probes: If so, how did your involvement affect your college experience? Why did you participate?

8. What was your experience with student support services?

Probes: Which services did you use? How did you learn about them? Were they helpful?

9. How do you think the campus environment affects your experience in school?

APPENDIX E: RECRUITMENT FLYER

ATTENTION

Looking for African American Male Students with a 3.5 GPA or higher
to participate in a one-hour, face-to-face interview on campus
to talk about your experiences as an
African American Male student at Houston Community College.

All interviews will contribute to a doctoral dissertation entitled:
Perceived Experiences that Positively Contribute to High Achieving African
American Male Student Success at a Large Urban Community College.

Participants will receive a small monetary gift for participating.

If you are interested in participating please contact:

Shantay Grays
Houston Community College
713-718-7497
sg_829@yahoo.com

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